

The Loner – Chapter 20 – Back to Normal?

You heard me say in the previous chapter that the winter came later for the winter of 2019-2020, right? They sold that extra 3 weeks of production, but next year didn't look so good. The Old Farmer's Almanac and the National Weather Service were both predicting that the winter would be shorter and warmer.

That was good news and bad news. They'd probably sell as much firewood the coming year as they had the last, but then, people would only replace what they burned and in the long run, their business would fall off. That was ok because once the kids' left for school, wherever they went, their firewood production could or would fall off anyway. Lately, Rob had been seeing a girl from the church and sometimes even double dating with Lane and Andy. The gal's name was Samantha, Sam for short, and it sure was funny how Mary didn't play the mother role. I guess that was just something reserved for men and their daughters. The men naturally assumed that their daughter's beau would do whatever they imagined they would in the same situation and well, you know where that led. (To erroneous assumptions.)

With the NWS announcing that the winter wouldn't be so bad, the Republicans went on national TV and announced the War with the Weather was won. Say, didn't Dubya do the same thing with the war in Iraq? How many people had died after that? Maybe the Republicans just liked to anticipate things a little, who could say? That War on Weather would be won when the summer and winters were back to normal because of Mother Nature and not one minute sooner. At least the President hadn't made the announcement from an aircraft carrier, this time. Election Day was a year away and the Democrat Party had a good candidate this year. He didn't succumb to engaging in the Republican tactics either and just pushed his domestic agenda. It was all about rebuilding the country's infrastructure. Smart fella, but IF he gets elected, how long will those campaign promises last?

Sounds to me like things are getting back to normal. The weather is getting marginally better and the politicians are lying again. A whole bunch of environmentalists sued claiming that it was unconstitutional to remove Environmental Impact studies, but I can't remember which clause of the Constitution covers Environmental Impact studies and believe me, I looked. I found the 2nd Amendment but the lawyers all claim that it doesn't really mean that we can have arms, just because it says so. I know the Geraldo was claiming that he had the real story behind the Kennedy assassination. And Scott Peterson was still on Death Row working on his umpteenth appeal. Geragos had appealed on the grounds that he didn't get a fair trial because the jury kept doing the musical chairs thing and everyone 'knew' that once they began deliberations that the entire jury pool became tainted by the two jurors who were removed from the jury.

Those Environmentalists were doing well in the 9th Circuit too. National Public Radio had a story on wind power. Evidently some guy decided to run some simulations and it turns out if we put up a lot of windmills it could disrupt the wind patterns and affect the weather. Make the poles colder and the equator hotter. They were screaming that we

couldn't do that because the poles were already beginning to cool off and we just had to have an Impact study before we built any windmills or too many wind turbines. Say, can a polar bear really catch cold if it gets cold way up north? The 9th Circuit seemed to think it could, but they wanted an Impact Study on what that meant. Sounds pretty normal to me.

The US Supreme Court finally granted Certiorari on that case from California that went back 15 years or more. Some girl was doing gymnastics on the playground and got expelled because she was a danger to herself and others and refused to stop doing cartwheels. Wasn't the same school that involved the Pledge of Allegiance; but it was still the 9th Circuit. Guess it didn't matter that that little girl was now 26 and had kids of her own in school; it was the principle of the thing. Don't you just love those schools out in California? You can graduate without being able to read or write, but you can't stick 2 little words in the Pledge of Allegiance or do cartwheels at school on noon recess. Come to think of it, I wish it wouldn't get back to normal. It was sort of peaceful when all we had to worry about was shoveling 18' of snow. Which was a problem in and of itself because who could throw snow on top of an 18' drift? I digress.

"Dad?" Rob asked.

"What is it Rob?" Jack inquired.

"Would you mind too terribly if I just went to the University of Colorado instead of to one of the military academies?" Rob asked.

"Rob, you can go to any school that you want to that will accept you," Jack replied. "Why the change of heart?"

"Well Sam is going to go to the U of C in Colorado Springs and even if I went to the Air Force Academy, we wouldn't get to see each other very much," Rob explained.

"What do you want to study, Rob?" Jack asked.

"Computer Science, Dad," Rob answered. "They have an undergraduate and a graduate program."

"I only have one question, Rob," Jack replied, "Are you going to U of C because of Computer Science or Sam?"

"Maybe a little bit of both," Rob admitted.

"I have no problem with it, then," Jack smiled, "At least you're being honest with yourself and me."

"And, if I go to the University of Colorado, I'll be able to help you harvest firewood during the summer," Rob added.

“Stabbed any bears with that Randall yet?” Jack asked.

“Huh? What do bears have with my going to Colorado Springs?” Rob asked.

“Never mind Rob,” Jack said, not wanting to explain to Rob that he was preaching to the choir. You may recall that Jack wasn’t so certain that he wanted Rob to go to a service academy. You may also recall the reason Rob gave for wanting that Randall knife. As far as Jack was concerned, he’d said ok and that was the end of it. But Rob had to give additional justification. He’d grow out of that bit of uncertainty in time, or suffer for it. Explaining it to him sure wouldn’t make any difference.

It would be nice to have Rob helping harvest wood, providing they still had a market. They probably would, the NWS only said the weather was improving; they didn’t say how long it would take to get completely back to normal. The winter was shorter and they were able to get into the woods exactly one week earlier using the Snow Cat on tires. And, it hadn’t gotten quite so cold, only down to –35. And, if you’re keeping track of the snow, they only had 14’. That 9’ Indian only needed a 6’ stepladder. Oh yes, lest I forget, the Forest Service assigned them to another area with a lot fewer bears.

“Mom isn’t going to plant the garden this year,” Mary announced. “That means that Lane and I will have to do it and work it in with splitting and delivering the wood.”

“Well, we’ll do it like last year then,” Jack suggested. “Rob and I will get as far ahead as we can on the logs and then come in and help split and deliver them.”

“Won’t that cut down on our production?” Mary asked.

“I’m sure it will, but it can’t be helped. Your Mom is old enough to not want to work like a slave in that garden growing food for two families,” Jack assessed.

“What price are we going to charge for the firewood? The other guys in town all cut their prices \$15 a cord,” Mary point out.

“Then so will we, Mary,” Jack stated. “We still give them a full cord instead of a pickup load. We’re going to get out a week earlier and if we can work a week or two later, the additional volume will make up for the price cut.”

“Assuming we can sell all we can harvest,” she demurred.

“Well, if we can’t, that’s no big deal, we weren’t going to be able to cut as much next year anyway,” Jack explained. “Say that reminds me, Rob told me that he is going to go to the University of Colorado in Colorado Springs and major in Computer Science.”

“I thought that might happen,” Mary chuckled, “Sam and he are getting pretty serious.”

“They’re growing up too darned fast to suit me,” Jack dissented.

“You didn’t really expect them not to grow up and leave home did you?” Mary asked.

“Not really, but the older I get the faster time seems to go,” Jack confessed. “We’ll start in the forest tomorrow. Is the ground dry enough to rototill yet?”

“I wish, but not for a couple of weeks, no,” she replied.

“Let us get you filled up on wood and in a couple of weeks you can lay off and till the garden,” Jack suggested. “Then when you gals get too far behind, Rob and I will split and stack and you can use both trucks and the trailer to deliver.”

“It would go a lot better if we had a second trailer,” Mary suggested. “There was a used one in the paper.”

“That’s a good idea, Mary,” Jack smiled. “If we have two trailers, it will speed everything up. Later when were done with it, I’ll give it a coat of paint and we’ll see if we can’t sell it for about what we paid.”

“Why don’t you use the GMC and we’ll get the old pickup in town and get that transfer case fixed,” she suggested. “I don’t really like driving a broken truck.”

“Suits me,” Jack agreed.

And the beauty of it was that the costs of the repair would be fully tax deductible because the old truck would be used solely in the business. The chain saws had been serviced, they’d been out to the range and practiced a little and were in the forest the next day. It was sort of a slow start so it was good that they got out early. It had been a hard 42 years for Jack and the muscles needed a little longer to get their tone up after the winter layoff. Not so Rob, he was out pacing Jack from the very start.

From the 11th of May until the end of the month, they hauled an average of three loads of logs a day back to the cabin and dumped them. Lane and Mary split for two weeks and then Mary tilled the garden and Lane raked and planted the seed. They had picked up the used trailer when the pickup came out of the shop. That repair bill was an ‘ouch’ but the truck needed more work than they thought. They stacked their wood, only 22 cords additional this year, and took 23 to Janice and Ed. Then, they loaded up the new trailer and the GMC and Lane began to deliver wood. They successfully managed like that until early in June when they had to take time out to weed the garden. The guys knocked off and Mary weeded and Lane delivered the wood as fast as she could. The prediction that everyone would resupply their stock was right on the money and several people also mentioned to Lane that if they hadn’t brought their price down to compete they would have lost some of their business.

Jack and Rob got all the wood split and stacked and Mary was ready to resume. Janice wasn't working in the garden, but she did agree to gather the eggs and feed the chickens and numerous miscellaneous chores, taking a little of the burden off Mary. Jack had picked up 2 more feeder pigs, too. Ed sort of stuck around their home and Jack and Mary began to suspect that he might be having health problems. Janice said it was nothing, so they didn't press. Have to admit, though, Ed look mighty peaked. By the 4th of July they had to knock off from the timber operation and return to the splitting. The garden was taking more time and there was canning to do.

They were actually about 15 cords ahead of the previous year according to Mary. Janice pitched in with the canning and everything was buzzing along when they overheard a radio call from Ed. The call was to the Sheriff's Department requesting an ambulance; apparently he'd had a heart attack. Rio Blanco County is in the northwest corner of the State of Colorado encompassing approximately 3,263 square miles or 22.2 million acres. Of the 22.2 million acres, 72% is federally owned, 20% is privately owned and the other 8% is either state or locally owned. The Rio Blanco County Sheriff's Office serves a population of approximately 6,276 with 2,402 residents living in the Meeker area that is located on the eastern end of Rio Blanco, and 2,278 residents living in the Rangely area located in the western end of the county. Rangely is the home of Colorado Northwestern Community College.

There wasn't a chopper available so they sent Meeker Ambulance Service and Fire and Rescue. It may not have made any difference; Ed was dead when the ambulance arrived. They lost time that week naturally, while Janice made funeral arrangements and they attended the services. Ed had no children and had left what he had to Janice. Then it was hurry and rush while the Mary and Lane harvested, canned and delivered firewood. The men helped in the garden a little and got completely caught up with splitting and stacking. Lane wasn't all that far behind on deliveries when they returned to the forest to resume cutting the logs. Janice gave Ed's car to Lane so she'd have a car of her own. And, she went into Meeker and bought Rob a good used diesel pickup, just to keep things even.

Lane finished up her deliveries and began to split wood. By this time the canning operation was a full time job and Mary didn't have time to help Lane. Lane would split a big stack of firewood and load it into the truck and trailer and then make 3 deliveries. She slowly began to fall behind and Rob and Jack knocked off again to split and stack while she made deliveries. Then came the 12th of August and everyone took on day off even though it was the middle of the week. Mary baked a cake and they invited Andy and Sam to join them in the celebration. By this time, they were about 20 cords short of the same point last year.

Having lost Paul to cancer and Ed to heart disease, Janice withdrew to an extent. She was no longer helping with the canning, contending herself to sit by that communications center in her living room. Not that she was old, but she'd buried 2 husbands and I suppose that she just needed some time to adjust. And while Jack and Mary were not complaining, Ed's death and Janice's withdrawal sort of threw a monkey wrench into the

works. Jack hadn't seen the movie *Heartbreak Ridge* so he didn't have the advantage of Gunny Highway's adage, *Improvise. Adapt. Overcome*. But they did their best. And they hadn't seen a bear all season.

Let me tell you, they were busy the summer of 2020, trying to keep things as close to normal as possible. By Labor Day, it still hadn't snowed and they were about 35 cords short of the previous year. But, a good portion of the garden was done and they only had potatoes to dig, carrots to pull and a few string beans. And the beets and some more corn and the late season onions. When the logs accumulated again, the kids and Jack worked on the firewood and Mary tried real hard to finish up the garden. And, I forget to mention that week they lost harvesting the fryers and broilers. The laying hens were also harvested early in the spring but that hadn't really cost them much time.

"I don't know if we're going to be able to meet all of the demand or not," Jack said on Labor Day.

"If the snow comes later, we would only need about 2 weeks to catch up," Mary said. "We can put off the school lessons and make them up during the winter. We can't let these people down, Jack, I accepted their orders."

"We'll have Lane fill them from our supply of firewood, but don't cut us below 3 cords," Jack decided. "If we get real lucky we can be almost caught up by the time we finished last year, counting the time we spent harvesting the extra wood. And, if the weather holds we might be able to lie in that extra wood we always seem to get orders for. But, I want you to charge \$250 a cord on all of those late season orders. As it is, we've lost \$15 a cord, but the price of fuel hasn't come down or the cost of supplies for the chainsaws."

By filling orders from their own supply of firewood, Jack was taking a calculated risk. Those weather guys had just better be right or they'd be in a world of hurts. One of the chainsaws broke but they had Ed's as a spare. Lane dropped it off to be serviced when she delivered 3 cords of wood. To make matters worse, this new area had lots of dead-fall, but it was further from the cabin. By Thanksgiving, they had all of the orders filled and were working on replacing their supply of firewood. There had been several light snowfalls, but nothing that kept them from working. They decided to forego those additional 15 cords that they had harvested the prior year after they sold the 455 cords. Hopefully, one of the other firewood suppliers would be able to pick up the slack.

The summer of 2020 had resulted in the sale of 455 cords of firewood at \$235 a cord, \$220 net. They netted \$100,100 or \$25,025 for each of the kids and \$50,100 for them. They stuck \$40,000 in another CD and hoped that they wouldn't have to cash it in early. The previous year, when they'd bought Janice's truck, they had exhausted the ready cash that they kept in a savings account. Needless to say, everyone was glad to see the end of the 2020 harvest. The kids were in pretty good shape for college, money wise but they were way behind on their lessons and there were the SAT exams coming up. Janice bought another beef and had it butchered and gave them half. Jack had the two

hogs butchered and processed and it appeared that they were about ready for another winter. Unfortunately there wouldn't be much time off this year for winter sports.

The kids sat for the SAT in the spring and both scored just shy of the maximum scores of 1600. Possibly they would have aced them, but they'd been playing catch up all winter long. With the scholastic records they'd accumulated and those high SAT scores, they were virtually guaranteed a place in the college of their choice. This coming fall, they'd both be seniors and the summer of 2021 would be the last full summer's harvest with everyone working.

With Mary and the kids tied up studying trying to get caught up, Jack found himself with a lot of free time on his hands. And, hunting season was closed by the time they finished with the harvest. So Jack decided to visit Janice and see how she was doing. Not well, let me tell you. Jack was no shrink, but it didn't take a doctor to see that Janice was very depressed. He couldn't get her to visit and finally gave up and went home.

"Mary your Mom is very depressed, I couldn't get her to talk to me," Jack reported.

"Look she didn't bother getting a flu shot this year and I'll call the doctor and schedule an appointment for that," Mary replied. "I'm sure the doc will see the depression and prescribe something."

"Why don't you talk to the doc when you call for that appointment?" Jack suggested. "He'll know to be looking for it if you give him a heads up."

"Sure," Mary agreed. "I'll call him right now."

That old doc that Janice used was a real charmer. His cultivated bedside manner was that of the simple old country doc who was everyone's friend. He gave her a complete physical and ran some lab work. Janice had lost some weight since her last visit and he suspected that she might be anemic. Death warmed over might be an accurate description of how she looked. He gave her the flu shot and an injection of vitamin B-12. There are two kinds of anemia, iron deficiency anemia and B-12 deficiency anemia and it's easy to tell from lab test which type it is. Unfortunately, the symptoms are nearly identical. The doctor treated the symptoms, and put her on an iron supplement and B-12. He agreed that Janice might be depressed, but that could be life or the anemia. Better safe than sorry, he prescribed Prozac, using a shotgun approach. He told Janice that he needed to see her again in two weeks so they could go over the lab results.

There are two stages of treatment for most conditions like this. The first is the treatment during the acute phase and the second is a prophylactic treatment to insure that it doesn't come back. Ever heard of Geritol? It's been a joke for a long time, but it was still on the market. Geritol is a multi-vitamin, multi mineral supplement. The lab said it was iron deficiency anemia and the doc drew more blood for a follow up to see how the treatment was working. The Prozac hadn't kicked in yet; it takes a minimum of 3 weeks to start to see its effects. Iron deficiency anemia is treated primarily with diet. The doc

told her to eat right and take Geritol. And, he told Jack to make good and sure that Janice followed his instruction and she'd be ok. The tests that the doc ran on the blood draws were extensive and his conclusion was that Janice was a little depressed that led her not to eat and one thing had led to another.

The problem with we geriatric patients is that we are sometimes a little bit stubborn and tend to do what we want rather than what's good for us. All of your health food nuts are going to recommend 101 different preparations to treat Janice's condition. Hey, that old doc knew what he was doing; he told her to take Geritol because he suspected that she thought Geritol was a joke and would take it just to humor him. There is a psychology involved with treating patients that most people are completely unaware of. Half dozen patients with identical conditions might be treated six different ways. Then, when they compare notes, you always hear, "Well, you should be taking XYZ, it works for me." Weather permitting Jack drove over to see Janice on a regular basis. She seemed to be improving. She was putting a little weight back on and seemed to be more herself.

The Loner – Chapter 21 – The Problem with Normal

You know the problem with things getting back to normal right? That means that people had lost their common enemy, or would, in this case the weather. And without a common enemy to bind them, people in the United States of America just couldn't get along. Mother Nature must have known that because she wasn't quite done setting things straight. It had taken a fairly long time to screw up the environment and it would probably take just as long or longer to get back to normal. In the spring of 2021, they got out by mid-April.

The advantage of the earlier spring was that by the first of May, Mary had the garden rototilled and planted. Lane was handling the splitting now and the pills were working wonders for Janice although she believed it was all because of the Geritol. The guys had started getting ready a week earlier because the previous season Jack had taken a week to get back up to speed. This year, Rob forced him to do calisthenics and even lift a few weights. Rob was about 4" taller than Jack and 20 pounds of muscles heavier. The Forest Service changed their harvest area again this year and put them in an area midway between the grizzlies and the area they'd harvested the previous year. With that in mind, they spent several days on the range. Because of the cost of the +P+ cartridges, they started out with .44 Remington magnums and only fired a couple of boxes of the heavy-duty stuff.

Shakespeare was guarding the ladies and Shep and Ranger the men. Ranger was proving to be a lot like Junior and Jack felt like he'd regained a friend. In no time at all, Rob and Jack had filled all of the available space around the cabin and had to either knock off and help the ladies or start stacking the cut logs where they were. They opted for the latter. They figured that once Mary got going on the garden they'd have to go in, but if they had a lot of wood piled, Jack could spilt, Lane could deliver and Rob could resupply. It has been suggested that there are other ways to handle their operation. But that involved a lot more equipment and that simply wasn't in the cards. They weren't really loggers, assuming that loggers cut down trees. They just cleaned up deadfalls for the Forest Service and were producing firewood not lumber.

Anyway by mid-June Mary was ready to start working in the garden, cultivating and harvesting and when the area around the cabin filled with logs, the 2 men came back to the cabin. So far, they hadn't seen any bear, but Shep and Ranger had alerted a couple of times. With 2 pickups and 2 trailers, they got a regular assembly line going. Lane would take off with 3 cords and Jack would split 3 more. Rob would bring in 3 cords, or slightly less of logs, and then stack firewood until Lane got back for another load. The amount of firewood orders had fallen slightly, probably because of the warmer weather. They resupplied Janice and put up their stack to handle the slowdown. They took their first real break around the 4th of July.

Of course, they did the chickens again and bought 2 more hogs. During their layoff around the 4th of July, they butchered the chickens, both the hens and the broilers. Maybe it was the smell of all of that chicken blood that cause the problem, no one was

quite sure. During the middle of the butchering a black bear showed up looking for a handout. The guys weren't wearing their revolvers because they weren't in the woods and neither were the women. Lane didn't have her gun because she was in and out of town twice a day and it was just too much bother. Mary didn't have hers because she just didn't.

One black bear against 4 German Shepherd's, Izzy was there too, doesn't seem fair for the bear. In my opinion, the German Shepherd is just one step down from a wolf anyway and you've probably seen what a pack of wolves can do with a bear on TV. The dogs' distraction gave them long enough to grab a revolver and shotgun but then the dogs were in the way. Everyone was calling to the dogs trying to get them to back off, but it wasn't doing any good. They stood and watched helplessly as the 4 dogs tortured that bear. Finally the bear had enough and departed for parts unknown. The dogs dropped their pursuit when the bear was clear of the cabin area.

"That was close," Mary observed. "I think that's the first bear that I ever saw anywhere around the cabin."

"Yeah and us all walking around without any thought of protecting ourselves," Jack agreed. "Like it or not, I think we're going to have to strap on the revolvers from now on."

"I'm not so sure my .45 colt will kill a bear," Janice said. "Can I have that western rig that Robbie bought and the Super Blackhawk?"

"Sure, but that's a pretty heavy rig for a woman to wear," Jack suggested. "The Super Blackhawk is 48 oz vs. 49 oz for the Redhawk. On the other hand, that western rig is pretty heavy and if you get a Redhawk, it should even out. The advantage, Janice, is that you can use these +P+ cartridges like Rob and me."

"You boys finish up plucking the chickens," Janice replied, "The girls and I are going to town."

The ladies got into the SUV and took the 629's with them.

"Mom, have you heard Jack firing those +P+ cartridges?" Mary asked. "They are like little sticks of dynamite when they go off."

"Yes, I've heard them," Janice said. "They probably even heard them in Meeker. But if I'm going to have to wear a gun around the house, I want something that will do the job. Otherwise, why bother?"

I guess you know the rest of that story, huh? They traded in the 629's on the Redhawks and picked up 3 holsters, 2 speed loaders (they interchange, remember), a speed loader case and 3 of the 5BLT size 12 holsters. They also bought Janice a heavy belt for her holster. When they got home, Rob and Jack were covered with feathers from one end to

the other. After they got done laughing, Janice told Jack that they needed to stop and go to the range, the chickens could wait. The dealer knew that Janice and Mary were Special Reserve Deputies and backdated the sale five days. Naughty, naughty? Only with respect to the gun for Lane, she wasn't a peace officer. But then, Lane didn't buy the gun because she was too young. And, what's the limit on the number of guns a peace officer can buy? (None) And the 2 Redhawks that he sold to Jack? Well, Jack's a peace officer, too.

Satisfied that everyone could kill the next bear that came wandering in looking for a handout, they finished plucking the chickens they had slaughtered that day. The 4th of July 2021 was on a Sunday and they spent from June 28th to July 3rd processing the chickens and shooting. After church on the morning of the 4th, Sam and Andy came back with Rob and Lane for the celebration.

"Why is everyone wearing a gun?" Andy asked.

"We had a bear come by on Tuesday Andy and we have to be careful," Jack explained.

"You'd never catch me walking around with a gun strapped on," Andy said.

"Why not?" Jack asked.

"Because there aren't any bears in town," Andy replied.

"What if you lived in the country?" Jack asked. "Let's say bear country?"

"Ahh, then I don't know, why?" Andy answered.

"Never say never Andy. Never is a very long time," Jack smiled. "What about you Sam, are you afraid of guns?"

"I don't know Mr. Summers, I've never fired a gun," Sam answered.

"Rob, you'd better think about teaching Sam to shoot," Jack suggested.

"I will Dad, when the time comes," Rob replied.

Well, you can't blame a father for thinking ahead, can you? Andy and Lane had been an item for about 2-3 years and Rob and Sam for over a year. And, regardless of what the NWS and the Old Farmer's Almanac said, Jack presumed that the bad winters would last for about another decade. Because of those winters, there were grizzly bears and now, according to the TV, wolves in Colorado. Worse, the populations of the animals seemed to be growing, sharply. He figured that it was just a matter of time until a Wolverine showed up looking for food.

You might be wondering about the cleanup from the log harvesting operation, I've never mentioned it. Anything that was too small to burn or too much work to recover was left right where it fell. A company that wanted to harvest the small stuff and turn it into mulch had approached the National Forest Service. The NFS had given them a permit and assigned them to the same areas as Jack, among others. It was a pretty large company, apparently. Sure made the firewood gathering a whole lot easier for Jack. In fact sometimes when Rob and he showed up to start cutting up a log, they'd already been there and stripped it for them. Nice guys, Jack hoped to run into them some day.

Andy had dropped a couple of hints on Lane and she'd simply told him that that would come if, and when they were married. She'd shared that with Rob and he'd said he was proud of her. It got him to thinking however and he dismissed any thoughts he had about making the same suggestion to Sam. All of which probably made the kids pretty unusual for the year 2021, but who's to say? You would have at least thought that when Janice got Rob that pickup she'd have stuck with GMC. Nope, got him a used Dodge. It was one of those 3500's with a club cab, rear dualies and 8' box. Nice truck but more of a work truck than that GMC. Ed's vehicle that Janice gave to Lane was a Ford Excursion SUV with a diesel engine, but it had some miles on it. He supposed that they came out even and maybe he was a little better off.

With Janice helping this year with the garden, must have been because she was feeling better, the firewood operation went very smoothly. Had to scare off grizz a couple of times, but no more charges. The early spring and late winter and taking mostly only Sundays off except for things like the chickens saw them working into November. They sold 420 cords at \$220 gross, \$205 net, dropping their net take to \$86,100, which was \$21,525 apiece for the kids and \$43,050 for them. The CD this year was only for \$30,000. And, he got that letter telling him that he didn't have to do any more disability examinations.

While they'd only sold 420 cords of wood, they'd only needed about 18 to fill in and Janice 17. When it was all said and done, they had 80 cords of firewood split and stacked for late season customers and the following year. Winter did come late, but it turned cold again and before long, they were getting orders for half cords so the folks could make it through the spring. Unsure of the best way to handle selling $\frac{1}{2}$ cords they sold them for \$120 plus \$25 for delivery and stacking. A lot of those folks had no way to pick up their wood and $\frac{3}{4}$ of the sales included the delivery charge. The math on that was $80 \times 2 = 160$ half cords at \$120 plus 120 deliveries at \$25, adding \$22,200 to their sales. Jack handled all of the deliveries and kept the delivery charges, only splitting the money from the sale of the wood. \$19,200 split 4 ways gave the kids another \$4,800 each for college and them another \$9,600. That money went into their savings account for emergencies.

Jack warned the late season customers that he'd be losing his labor force the following fall and they probably couldn't get any more of the late season wood. He told them that he was only going to take orders for 350 cords and if they were planning on buying the coming year, they'd better order early. Janice bought a side of beef apiece, but they

ended getting about $\frac{3}{4}$ of the meat. She simply didn't have the freezer room. Between the extra beef and the hogs, they ended up needing to buy another freezer. This time they bought the largest upright they could find and squeezed it into the cabin. It was a Whirlpool 24.7 cubic foot upright, white on white and went for nearly a grand.

The kids would be leaving the coming year and they decided to get a Food Saver and vacuum pack those packages of meat from the locker plant. They had always practiced writing the dates on the packages and they knew that they'd have to use up the oldest food first. So, the oldest food went into the upright and the new stuff in the chest types in the shelter. Jack had a funny feeling that more or less defied description, call it a sinking feeling in his gut, and he went out and got an elk to finish filling off the chests in the shelter.

Christmas was easy; they bought each kid a new laptop computer. I know that Lane already had one, but it was beginning to show its age. Janice did the clothes bit this year; she definitely was back to her old self. It appeared that the kids were set for college, they had large high interest savings accounts and most of the things that they would need for college. Each had received a letter of acceptance from the University of Colorado. Rob, as planned, was going to Colorado Springs and Lane was going to the Denver campus, probably because that was where Andy was going.

While the snow came late in 2021, they had about the same accumulation as the previous year. It was noticeably colder however, so Mother Nature obviously hadn't finished her task. Spring came early and while they had to take time out for graduation ceremonies, the kids had done their shopping on good days during the winter. If you were using just the coming and goings of the season, things were back to normal, but those 'unseasonable' temperatures belied that fact. For home schooled kids, Rob and Lane did very well, graduating in the top 5% of their class. They had also managed to make it to Meeker for their Senior Prom.

The thing was that by the time graduation rolled around, Rob and Jack had been in the woods for nearly 2 months, Lane had delivered all the spit firewood and Mary and Janice had the garden in and were just about ready to begin harvesting. Maybe the fact that this would be their last summer at home motivated the twins to work harder. Or maybe they were just hoping to put away another year's college expenses. Except for Sundays, they worked right up to 2 days before they had to leave for school. Both had put their vehicles in the shop and had them fully serviced and it wouldn't take them that long to pack.

About the last thing they did was open checking accounts and linked their saving accounts as overdraft protection. There were tears and hugs and all of the usual emotions as they got into their vehicles and left for college. Jack took a couple of days off to catch his breath. Rob had darn near run him into the ground and they left and arrived home in the dark allowing them to use every bit of daylight. They had managed to cut, split and deliver 400 cords of wood to that point. The price had stabilized at \$220/cord and \$120/half cord. But, that was about the only price that had stabilized and if they hadn't

been growing most of their own food, this year would have forced them into their savings. Each of the kids had added \$20,500 to their savings accounts giving them over \$100,000 apiece to start college.

Had the kids still been there this year's production would have surpassed last years but they weren't and it didn't. Jack and Mary worked together in the woods and cut another 75 cords before they gave up. Then, they started to haul it in and split it. There was snow on the ground by the time they finished and out of the 75 cords they'd taken 25 for themselves. The remaining wood sold as full cords, netting them another \$10,250. Both of them were tired going into the winter of 2021-2022. With no more home schooling to complete, after they'd rested, they found themselves with free time on their hands for the first time since they'd taken Rob and Lane as foster children.

Of course, they knew what to do with some of that free time, but you couldn't live in bed. The kids called about every other week and kept them apprised of their progress in school. Both of the twins had decided to live in the school dorms because it helped stretch their money. And, they said that they were getting to church most Sundays. Neither of them gave any indication that they were doing other than outstanding in school. In fact, although Andy was class Valedictorian, he was having a harder time with school than Lane. Yep, they both went to the Denver campus. Obviously there were certain benefits to having a class size of 2 and having both students in the same grade. Mary and Jack had been able to work in some additional material that the Meeker School system knew nothing about.

It also took some adjusting for Mary to get used to cooking for just 2 people who had far smaller appetites than those growing teenagers. And, they cut the size of the broiler flock and the eggs flock so they had less chickens to butcher. Jack also limited himself to a single hog and Janice had only bought a side of beef. All of this meat was also sealed in the vacuum bags and they rotated their food inventory for another time. They also passed on hunting this year because the season was over before they'd finished the firewood.

The Loner – Chapter 22 – Home for the Holidays

The kids had been home for Thanksgiving, forcing Mary and Jack to take a break. This year they drove into Meeker and bought a turkey and all of the trimmings. Most of their Thanksgivings had been more traditional and had consisted of a variety of wild game. One rumor had it that turkey wasn't a big thing on Thanksgiving until the 20th century. A check of the net would reveal that most turkey growers associations had started between WWI and WW II with a goal of promoting the sale of the birds. Maybe the rumor was true, but did it matter? After the kids all went back to school, they had finished up the firewood and called it a year. The interval between Thanksgiving and Christmas was so short that they barely finished up before the kids were home again.

There was a subtle change in the demeanor of the kids, probably because they'd been away from home for the first time since they'd moved in back in 2008. And, here it was just a few days away from 2023. I say subtle because Rob and Lane were very independent. That's the way they'd been raised and all of that hard work had shown them their own self-worth. They had earned their own college expenses and although they'd been given things, they knew that it was all up to them from this point on. Clearly Mary and Jack wouldn't be able to help them financially, to any appreciable extent.

"How is school going?" Jack asked over dinner.

"Who are you asking, Lane or me, Dad?" Rob asked.

"Both. Either," Jack replied.

"I'm doing fine," Lane said. "It sure is different being in a big class with a lot of other students. It's not like when Mom was teaching us. But, I think that I'm doing fine on grades."

"I agree with Lane," Rob said. "It will be better once we get to work on the bigger computers, though. They don't start that right away."

"How do you like living in Denver Lane?" Mary asked.

"It's too big and there are too many people," Lane answered. "I try to stay on campus most of the time. Besides, there's been some trouble and I don't feel safe walking around Denver alone."

"The Sheriff of Rio Blanco County doesn't require a reason for a CCW permit," Jack pointed out. "You have to be 21, but can get a temporary, emergency permit if you are 18. They're good for 5 years and not that expensive. I'll talk to the Sheriff about each of you getting one. You have to take the classes and so forth, but I imagine we could get it all done while you're home on Christmas vacation."

"Dad, it's on a school ground," Rob pointed out.

“Doesn’t matter, Rob,” Jack said.

“I don’t know how I’d feel about wearing a gun,” Lane said.

“We’ll get you one of those purses and get Rob an inside of the waistband holster,” Jack explained. “Now, I’m wondering what would be the best gun for you kids to carry.”

“I’m going with a Glock 27,” Rob said. “It’s a .40 S&W and a highly concealable, personal defense pistol with a 9 or 11 shot magazine.”

“Traitor,” Jack muttered, almost under his breath.

“That will work for me, too, Dad,” Lane agreed.

“You know, on second thought, why don’t you two just wear those BOB’s, they’re nothing but fanny packs and there’s room in there for the guns,” Jack suggested. “That way, you’ll always be prepared. We’ll set you up with extra magazines and whatever feeds best, hopefully JHP.”

The Sheriff had no objections and was running a special class. The dealer didn’t have any model 27’s in stock, but he did have 2 model 23C’s. Same caliber, just a slightly larger weapon; nice weapon too, weighed about 21 ounces plus 10 ounces per magazine. They bought 4 15 round spare magazines for each pistol. For ammo, they got some Winchester 155 grain Super X Silvertip JHP. 1205 fps and 500 ft. lbs. muzzle energy. Now, those permits were just temporary, emergency permits, you understand. Wouldn’t become regular CCW permits until they were 21. Rob didn’t really need one in Colorado Springs, but Jack seemed to be pretty persistent on the subject and wouldn’t consider them not having the Glock’s.

Something must have gotten into Jack because while they were home on Christmas vacation, he had each vehicle fitted with auxiliary fuel tanks, replaced the alternators with generators and added a second plus extra batteries plus a few other “improvements” like emergency kits containing flashlight, batteries, flares, towing strap, tire inflators, first aid kits, fire extinguishers, additional rations (lifeboat) and water, 50-50 anti-freeze. Also included were a small toolkit and a roll of duct tape. Although the twins had had the vehicles serviced, they hadn’t put on new belts and Jack made sure all of the belts and hoses were replaced. He told the kids that it was a Christmas bonus. He told Mary that he was worried and that you couldn’t be too careful. He also made sure that the kids took their long guns and a case of ammo. Rob had the Remington, and they gave Lane one of the model 70 .30-06 rifles.

“Look you two, I want you to keep your tanks full or mostly full,” Jack instructed. “Never find yourself in the position where you can’t get home without stopping for fuel. There are enough supplies for you and one other person, which I assume would be Sam or Andy. And, don’t ask me why I’m doing this; I just have a bad feeling.”

You may recall the description of their BOB's. To round out their equipment, Jack put together fanny packs that contained a good quality, but reasonably priced folding knife, and various survival supplies (firestarters, waterproof matches, fishing kit, space blanket, etc.). Janice added Garmin personal GPS's to the fanny packs. They added some water packs and a lifeboat rations and a very compact first aid kit. Now, Jack added the handguns and 2 extra magazines and a Leatherman to each fanny pack and told them to carry the other 2 magazines in their vehicle emergency kit and half of the case of ammo he'd purchased. He didn't send the AR's or the M1A's because having a hunting rifle wouldn't particularly attract attention while an AR or MBR would.

"You know, we both have those Redhawks," Rob said, "It might be a good idea to include them in the vehicle emergency bag."

"Now you're thinking," Jack agreed. "Take five boxes of those heavy Buffalo Bore cartridges, five of the JHP, the speed loaders and the holsters. If you think of anything else, let me know."

In addition to the fanny packs that he emphasized they should wear at all times, he downloaded a computer program called 72 Hour Emergency Preparedness and prepared them each a 72 hour bag for 2 people. Who knows what was motivating Jack, maybe he was just being a nervous Dad. His only response, when asked, was basically, "Humor me." Andy rode home with Lane and Sam with Rob. The twins decided that they should just keep their Dad's odd behavior to themselves and just pass the additional stuff in the vehicles off as emergency equipment that they'd received for Christmas. When the young people all got together to head back to college after Christmas break, Jack reminded them about keeping the fuel tanks nearly full.

"All right, Jack," Mary said after they'd left, "I went along with all of that foolishness, but I want to know what is bugging you."

"I'm not sure Mary, but when Lane said what she did about Denver not being safe, it occurred to me that with things starting to get back to 'normal' we could be returning to some of the problems we had before those terrorists did all of that bombing."

"I presumed that that was a dead subject," Mary retorted sharply.

"I hope you're right, but you know that the Republicans never could overturn the AWB and I suspect that there are still a lot of angry people around the US," he replied. "Anyway, what can it hurt if they have the supplies that they might need in an emergency? It may be very cold outside, but it doesn't appear that we're getting as much snow this year, honey," Jack continued. "When I first moved to Colorado, I was a committed loner. Then I met you and everything changed. But down deep inside I believe that a person should always be prepared to stand on his or her own two feet and face up to anything that life throws at them. I told both of them that if it looked like the state or national situation was deteriorating rapidly to bug out and come home."

“There has to be more to it than just that,” Mary insisted.

“Did you see that piece on the news?” Jack asked. “Apparently Iran and North Korea both lied about shutting down their uranium enrichment programs. There was a test blast about 6 months ago off of South Africa and another about 3 months ago out in the Pacific. I went to the Global Security website and in the past 15-20 years, both of those countries have completed development of long range ICBMs. Now, if that wasn’t bad enough, there is an environmental group trying to stop the development of that second oil field in Alaska. They reportedly said that they would go to any lengths, legal or otherwise, to prevent that field from opening.”

“Nobody is going to start a nuclear war, Jack,” Mary insisted.

“Probably not, Mary but you remember that bunch that they brought the Special Forces in to handle a few years ago?” he continued. “Apparently, the guys they got were part of a larger group that went underground. They couldn’t do much the past few years between the terrorist bombings and the weather, but I heard someone talking about them on CNN.”

“Maybe you should have sent the AR’s with the kids,” she suggested.

“I thought about it, but they would have been too hard for them to explain,” he said.

“I hope that you’re wrong,” Mary grimly concluded.

“That makes 2 of us,” Jack said. “Oh the kids said that they wouldn’t be home for spring break.”

“Lane mentioned that,” Mary smiled. “She said they might drive down to Florida and hit the beaches.”

“I think we can cut back on the garden, the number of chickens and only get one hog this coming year,” Jack said, “What do you think?”

“You’re right on the garden and chickens, but it wouldn’t hurt to do two hogs,” she suggested. “Either that or lay in an extra supply of hams and bacon. If it were up to me, we’d smoke both the center loins on that second hog. And, we could get the butt roasts cut into pork steak.”

“Sure, sounds good, but why the change?” Jack asked.

“No particular reason, Jack,” Mary said, “But it would be nice to just mix it up a little for a change.”

What they hadn't counted on was the wildlife communications network (tongue in cheek). That bear must have told his cousin, a skunk bear, about the good food at the cabin. Late in February, that skunk bear, also called a wolverine, got into the chicken coop and killed all of the hens. The dogs really howled, but by the time Jack and Mary got dressed and out to the chicken coop, they were too late. All of the hens were dead and the place stunk to high heaven. Mary suggested that a skunk had gotten into the coop, but Jack wasn't so sure. The tracks weren't right for a skunk and no skunk could have left claw marks like that. They agreed that the flock and the building were a total loss.

Izzy and Shep were beginning to show their age, too. They were both at least 10 years old and maybe Izzy was a year or two older. Izzy became crippled with some kind of a bone disease and Janice had to put him down. She took Shep home to live with her, leaving them with Ranger and Shakespeare. She agreed with Mary on the second hog, by the way. She said she just loved Canadian bacon. Considering her age, Janice turned in her badge to the Sheriff and he issued her a CCW permit.

The spring of 2023 finally rolled around and the folks were very grateful for the heat. While the temperatures hadn't reached the previous record lows, it had been as cold as a couple of years earlier. Jack wasn't in any particular hurry to get into the woods either. He burned down the chicken coop and bought a new shed in Meeker. He wasn't quite sure how to keep a wolverine out if one decided to come back the following year, so he wrapped the building in some used cyclone fencing. They bought 24 laying hens, 78 broilers and 2 hogs. He rototilled the garden for Mary and helped her plant. Then, the two of them headed for the woods.

That especially cold winter had eaten into their personal supplies of firewood and the first thing they did was replenish their supply and Janice's. This was the same area that they worked the year before. When school got out, Rob showed up and replaced his Mom in the woods. Of course, like any young person, he was filled with stories about what he'd learned the first year of school. Lane showed up a week later to help Mary. Although demand for firewood was up because of the colder winter, they only took orders for 400 cords. The price was back up too, hitting \$240 a cord delivered.

With 3 pickups available, Mary found them another used trailer and both women could deliver firewood, 3 cords at a time. The guys worked ahead building up the cut logs and then they'd come to the cabin and let the gals make the deliveries while they split and stacked. They stopped in July and butchered the broilers but got lucky, no bear showed up this year. Sam came out most days to help Mary, Lane and Janice with the garden and Andy showed up and hauled wood from the forest to the cabin. With the extra help, the guys actually had more time to cut logs and they were well ahead of the prior year's production. During the 4th of July week, Sam helped them do the chickens and Andy kept hauling logs in from the forest.

"So, Sam, did Rob teach you to shoot yet?" Jack asked.

“He took me to a range and taught me to shoot the Glock,” Sam said.

“You haven’t shot a rifle yet?” Mary asked.

“No place to shoot and not enough free time,” Sam said.

“Rob, you get those Super Match rifles with the suppressors and get her out on the range,” Mary instructed.

“What about you Andy?” Jack asked.

“What about me?” Andy asked back.

“Did Lane teach you to shoot the Glock?” Jack asked.

“Yeah, but I don’t see the point,” Andy retorted.

“What if there were some kind of national emergency and things went to hell?” Jack asked. “We call those TSHTF scenarios. What would you do then?”

“We’d try to get back here to Meeker,” Andy replied.

“Ok, but what if circumstances and people tried to prevent that?” Jack continued.

“Do you really think it would come to that?” Andy asked.

“Andy, I don’t know what would happen and that’s just the point,” Jack explained. “Now, Lane and Rob’s vehicles are fully equipped to allow you to make the trip back, but that doesn’t really allow for the human factor.”

“I see what you mean, I guess,” Andy responded. “I don’t suppose that it would hurt for me to learn to use the rifle. That doesn’t mean that I’d have to use it but if something went wrong, that would make for a pretty sharp learning curve.”

The Loner – Chapter 23 – Time Slips Away

The remainder of the summer was a mixture of harvesting, canning, sawing, splitting and hauling. Because of the help that Andy and Sam were lending, Jack and Rob managed to have enough firewood sawn to be able to split almost 500 cords. Jack and Mary talked it over and they decided to split the proceeds 6 ways this year. Sam and Janice had managed to do all of the garden work and canning and Andy had humped a lot of logs. Jack calculated the distribution based on delivering 500 cords at \$240-\$15 or \$225 net. $500 \times \$225 = \$112,500$ divided by 6 equals \$18,750 apiece. Sam was totally speechless and Andy stammered.

They still had wood to haul in and split and deliver when the kids went back to school, so they used both trucks and trailers to haul it in. When the area around the cabin couldn't hold another log, they started splitting the wood and then Mary made the deliveries and Jack did the splitting. Although they had only taken orders for 400 cords, the people in the area didn't stop calling and Jack raised the price to \$250 a cord for the final 100 cords, giving them an extra \$1,000 of pure profit. They were going to need the money, having given that money to Andy and Sam. Maybe given isn't the right word, without their help, they have never harvested 500 retail cords.

"I'd have thought that we'd run into a bear this year," Jack said. "Never even had the dogs brace the entire summer."

"I think it was nice of you to send the other .30-06 back with Lane and to find a .308 in Daddy's collection for Andy," Mary noted.

"Well, they each have 2 handguns with them and ought to have two rifles," Jack replied.

"They said that they wouldn't come home for Thanksgiving this year," Mary reported. "So I don't suppose we'll see them until Christmas."

"That's ok," Jack said, "We still have a lot of that wood to haul in, split and deliver. As much as I like Thanksgiving, it eats up time. I never thought that I'd still be harvesting firewood after the kids left for school, but this was a pretty good year for us."

"It would have been better if you hadn't given Andy and Sam quite so much money," Mary observed.

"True, but I think of it as keeping it in the family," Jack chuckled. "There doesn't seem to be much doubt that Andy and Lane will get married and I think Rob has a winner in that Sam."

"She's turning into a regular country housewife," Mary agreed. "It didn't take her long to get the hang of canning and she even learned to split wood."

"Your mother was looking a little peaked," Jack said.

“I don’t believe she’s feeling well,” Mary replied.

That fall they finished up with the remaining firewood and were settled in ready for the winter by mid-November. Mary called Janice to see if she would be over for Thanksgiving dinner and nobody answered the phone. Mary thought that odd because Janice always let her know when she was going to Meeker. They got in the pickup and went to check on her. They found her sitting in her chair at the radios, dead and cold. Shep was standing guard over the body like a sentinel. Jack called a mortuary in Meeker and asked them to pick up Janice. Then, he got on the phone to the kids. They scheduled the funeral for a Saturday and they kids all came back in Lane’s SUV. They only stayed long enough for the funeral and then returned to Denver and Colorado Springs.

It looked like they had chores to take care of this winter. Jack took the hogs to be butchered and they started to slowly work through Janice’s things. The clothes went to charity and they were surprised to find that Janice had a bigger gun collection than they’d ever imagined. She had 2 more Super Match rifles, completely outfitted but still in their boxes. She also had 2 AR15’s complete with the M4-FA suppressors and about 40 magazines apiece. There was her fast draw rig and the Redhawk and a pretty fair supply of ammunition for all of the guns. And Janice had apparently been buying from Walton Feed or one of the other suppliers because her basement was stuffed with the long-term storage food items, so much, in fact, that they couldn’t move it to the shelter.

Janice’s will left her home to Lane and an equivalent amount of money in a CD to Rob. The only things that she left to Mary were her personal possessions. Mary had been warned and Janice had told her that she wasn’t being disinherited, but that Jack was providing well enough for them and she wanted to avoid taxes and pass the things on to her grandchildren. When Janice had told Mary about her arrangements, Mary had never dreamed that it would come this soon. They had the body shipped back to Wisconsin and buried alongside Paul.

The winter of 2023-2024 was as cold as the previous year but the snowfall was down to the point that the 9’ Indian only needed his stump again. Shep didn’t seem to get over Janice’s death and he died. They would end up burying him next to Junior in the spring. But, it wasn’t spring just quite yet and Shep resided in the shed in a box until the ground thawed. All of that had come after the kids had been home for Christmas.

“Look you guys,” Jack had said during Christmas break. “I want you to each take one of the M1A’s and one AR15’s back with you when you return to college.”

“Lane, we decided to leave all of the furniture at Mom’s house,” Mary said, “So if Andy and you decide to come back home to live, you’ll have a completely furnished house.”

“He hasn’t even asked me to marry him, Mom,” Lane replied.

“Yet,” was all Jack had to say on that subject.

Rob had taken Jack aside and shown him a diamond engagement ring that he'd bought for Sam. He wanted to discuss it with Jack before he popped the question. He told Jack that if Sam said yes, they'd get married in a couple of years, after graduation. Jack asked Rob if he were still planning on going to Graduate school and Rob said that yes, he was. He was going for a PhD in Computer Science if he could get it. After that, he said, he thought that maybe he'd teach. Sam wasn't planning on going past her Bachelor's degree. They'd hold off on kids until he had completed Graduate school. Jack gave his blessing and Rob went through the same routine with Mary before he approached Sam. (Sam said yes)

Lane was majoring in Elementary Education and Andy in Math. Somehow that sort of figured, if you think about it. Lane figured on getting a job in the Meeker School system and Andy was talking about teaching at Colorado Northwestern Community College in Rangely. The only problem with that was that Rangely was 55 miles west of Meeker or about 70 miles from Lane's home. It would be tough enough for her to get to town to teach during the winter, let alone for him to commute 70 miles one way. You know about icebergs, right?

Only about $\frac{1}{9}$ th of the iceberg shows above water with the remainder being submerged. It turned out Andy was like an iceberg and when Lane returned home in the spring of 2024, Andy was history. Apparently the young man just couldn't wait as Lane had told him he'd have to and he dropped her for another gal who had said yes. If stuff like that is going to happen, better you should find out about it before you get married, not after. Lane surmised that if Andy would do what he did, he wasn't the man for her. She wasn't particularly broken hearted, however. She said that there were plenty of fish in the sea and that maybe she'd just wait until after she graduated from college and returned home before she looked for a man. Like she'd have to look!

What kind of woman did Lane turn into when she'd grown up? She was about 5'6" tall, without an ounce of uncalled for fat on her body. She had waist-length brunette hair and a more than respectable figure. And she was just plain pretty. Rob was taller, go figure, at 5'11". Like Lane, he didn't have an ounce of fat on his body. The boy must have found time to work out and he admitted that he'd taken up running for a hobby. Sam was Lane's size, in every respect, except that she had cut her hair to shoulder length. She was every bit as pretty as Lane, too. Sam was majoring in Liberal Arts.

Lane apparently didn't relish the idea of commuting to Meeker and she offered to give Rob the house in exchange for his cash inheritance. Rob thought it over and they made the swap. It was simple enough to do; the money Janice had left Rob was in a high interest, 30-month CD at the bank. Once that transaction was completed in the spring of 2024, Rob moved into Janice's house along with Lane and Sam. Yeah, yeah, I know, but it was a 3-bedroom cabin/house and Lane chaperoned. Gave Jack and Mary the same privacy that they'd become accustomed to with the kids being off to college, too. Besides, Rob wasn't Andy and had he been living in Denver, Andy would have probably needed dentures. They never saw Andy after that, which was probably just as well.

With Janice gone, Sam stepped in and did all of the gardening and canning during the summer of 2024. Lane alternated between hauling in logs from the woods and delivering split firewood. With this arrangement, they managed to keep pace with the previous year. Also, with Janice gone, Jack skipped raising hogs entirely this year and cut the flock to 52 broilers plus the roasting hens. They did get Shep buried as soon as the ground thawed, in case you're wondering. Ranger went to the woods with the men and Shakespeare rode with Lane everywhere she went. Now Shakespeare must have been talking to Izzy before he died, because he was very protective, but not too much so.

That sort of left Sam and Mary without a dog to watch over them and there was no way they were going to contact Andy's family about a dog. So, Mary got on the net and went looking for a fully trained, level 3, family/executive protection dog. Found one at the same place Janice had gotten Izzy and they were in business. \$4,500, by the way, but how much is a human life worth? The new dog's name was Champ and he was about 2 years old. So then, they had to go through the dog meets dog and decided whether or not they like each other thing, but it worked out ok.

That summer, they did all of the chickens in 2 days and barely paused for the 4th of July or the kids' birthdays. Because of the exceptionally cold winter, demand for firewood was up and the price went to \$250 a cord delivered. They'd still stack the firewood if the customer insisted, but the price for stacking was \$50 and nobody insisted. They didn't have time to fool around stacking firewood for people anyway. And, they probably could have sold 600 cords if they could have harvested that much. They set up a couple of electric heater's in Janice's old home after she died to keep the place above freezing and the pipes from turning to ice. It hadn't taken much to resupply her firewood pile and they did both 'hers' and theirs right off the bat.

"Where are you going to teach after you get your' PhD?" Jack asked.

"Having Grandma's house kind of put a crimp in my plans Dad," Rob said. "I was thinking about running a computer consulting firm right out of the house."

"It's just a house, Rob," Jack said, "Don't change your career plans over a building."

"But I want to come back here to live," Rob protested. "And Sam does, too."

"Can you make any money doing computer consulting from your home?" Jack asked.

"You bet, Dad, you'd be surprised," Rob replied. "And the beauty of it is that being self-employed, I can work when I want and work with you in the forest in the summer, if I want to."

"I can't see you spending several years in college just to end up doing what amounts to manual labor," Jack objected.

“Well, what would you rather have me do, sit on my butt and get fat?” Rob asked. “No, Dad, there’s nothing wrong with my splitting my efforts. In the slow months, I can make a bundle programming or whatever and in the summer, I can keep in shape.”

“Have you talked this over with Sam?” Jack asked.

“It was as much her idea as mine, Dad,” Rob replied, ending the discussion.

Plans have a way of changing; look at the situation with Lane and Andy. But, to tell what would happen would be to get way ahead of the story. So, figure they will change and wait to find out what happens (in 3 years). In the late summer while Jack and Rob were cutting, Ranger picked up and began to growl. They didn’t hear him over the chainsaws and it wasn’t until he started barking that he got the men’s’ attention. It was the biggest, meanest looking grizzly that either Rob or Jack had ever seen. The danged thing must have been pushing 1,500 pounds. Just about the time they laid down their chainsaws and went for their Redhawks, the bear charged. The Buffalo Bore ammo had finally proven its worth. It took 4 shots to put that bear down. It also ended their work for the day because they had to turn the carcass into the CDW.

“And you want to do this for a living in the summer, Rob?” Jack asked on the way to turn in the carcass. “You have to be out of your mind.”

“We killed the grizz, Dad,” Rob said, “What’s to worry about? Those bears are just an occupational hazard. Besides, any bear that would come around 2 guys running chain-saws is a real bad character.”

“I’m getting too old for this stuff,” Jack said uncharacteristically.

“You’re only 46,” Rob said. “That’s not old.”

“Maybe not, kid,” Jack laughed, “But at times like this, I feel like I’m 100.”

“The Sheriff said that he’d give us full blown CCW’s for when we return to college,” Rob changed the subject.

“What about Sam?” Jack asked.

“Her too, Dad, her birthday is August 30th,” Rob said. “I think I’ll put together a fanny pack for her with a Glock 27.”

“You’ll have to special order that model, Rob; why not get her a model 23C?” Jack asked.

“I’ll just get her whatever she’s comfortable with,” Rob replied. “If she wants a 23C, I think maybe I’ll buy a 22C for myself.”

“What about magazines?” Jack asked.

“All of our extra magazines are 15-round Glock factory mags and will fit in all three models,” Rob said.

“Just curious,” Jack remarked. “We’ll probably catch hell because that grizz charged us. Your Mom gets worked up every time that happens.”

“I seem to recall that the previous charge really bummed you out, too,” Rob said.

“Yeah, well, it took 6 shots to stop that other sucker,” Jack reminded Rob. “I’m happy we have the Buffalo Bore ammo.”

Mary looked up and saw the men pulling in early without a load of wood. “Grizz again?” she asked.

“Yeah and this one tipped the scales at 1535 pounds,” Jack said.

“Big one, huh?” she grimaced.

“Yeah, we’re going to take the rest of the day off from the woods, need help splitting?”

“Rob and you spit and Lane and I will deliver,” she suggested.

“How many cords have gone out?” Jack asked.

“We’ll take 6 bringing the total to 402,” Mary replied. “That’s a shade over 100 grand so far.”

“There’s at least another hundred to haul in from the forest,” Jack said. “How many cords are we committed to deliver?”

“500 even, Jack,” Mary said. “I cut it off there because without Andy to help out, I wasn’t sure how much we could handle. But, I imagine we can probably sell more than that. I was thinking that we might sell the 25 cords at Rob’s house if people were desperate, but we’d have to restock it before winter.”

“We have 2 weeks before the kids leave, go ahead and sell those 25 cords and 25 more,” Jack suggested. “That will give us around 550 to spit 5 ways.”

“Ok,” Mary agreed. “Let me tell you, without Sam helping out we’d have been sunk. That girl’s a real wonder.”

They worked almost to the last possible day before the kids headed back to school. There was enough wood cut by then, and after the kids left, Jack rotated between hauling it in and splitting and Mary between splitting and delivering. They were into the first

week of November 2024 when they finally replaced the 25 cords at Rob's house. The final take for 2024 was 550 cords at \$235 (net) equals \$129,250 divided 5 ways or \$25,850 per kid (including Sam) and \$51,700 for them. It appeared that the kids would have plenty of money for college at this rate.

The Loner – Chapter 24 – Christmas Vacations

Sam had started going to college on a bare bones scholarship and the money she'd made helping the Summers family had made all of the difference in the world to her. Rob told her that without her helping out, they would have never been able to make as much money selling firewood and that she'd earned every penny both years. Andy, he said, was a fool. Andy had a full scholarship and had really pooped in his mess kit. Besides, Rob said, as hinky as Andy was on the subject of firearms, if they ever got in a TSHTF situation, he'd probably just fold up. Obviously, Rob didn't think too much on Andy.

Sam told Rob that with the money she'd made these past two summers she could stay and get a Master's of Arts and maybe a teaching degree. Rob suggested that he might quit when he got his masters, but that remained to be seen. He'd talked to his Dad some, but wasn't really ready to make up his mind what he wanted to do. Probably, he told her, move back to their house and settle down and raise a family. They still had 2 more years of undergraduate education before they had to make any final decisions.

Jack decided to buy the kids current topo maps for their Garmin personal GPS units. Since they had laptop computers with CD ROM drives, they had a choice of the map software that they could load into the GPS units, depending upon the situation or need. He'd helped Rob make up a fanny pack for Sam and she had opted for the Glock 23C. Rob had bought himself the Glock 22C as he'd planned. Sam's fanny pack was identical in every way to the one that Lane and Rob carried with the exception of the firearms. Rob must have been thinking that he was richer than John D. Rockefeller because he also bought Sam one of those Randall knives identical to his and his Dad's.

The problem with the Randall was that it wasn't really a hunting knife, but a fighting knife. Which might be great if you were in the military in some place like Vietnam; but one of those Randall Bowie knives might have been a better choice. When you got into a knife of that quality, it was all a matter of personal preference anyway. Considering how much a Randall cost, there were probably a lot of them that were purely collector's items. Then again, there was a hatchet in the 72-hour BOB, so maybe a fighting knife was just what the doctor ordered. Lane, by contrast, had also bought herself a Randall knife, but she bought a model 12 6" 'Little Bear Bowie'. Her knife was a compromise and had about 4⁵/₈" of the top of the blade sharpened which made it both a hunting knife and a fighting knife.

Since Sam and him both had the Garmin GPS units, Rob loaded the topo maps into hers and the updated the roadmap software in his. They had been sharing his laptop computer and since money wasn't much of a concern for him, he bought her a laptop for Christmas. Sharing the laptop had been a real pain in the butt, to tell the truth. They'd had over \$100,000 when they started college and now had more. Living in the dorm and eating in the school cafeteria helped him save money and even to buy incidental things like diamond engagement rings and computers. Lane was the one with all of the money anyway. She'd spent less than her brother and had that CD tucked away.

“Are you limping more than normal?” Mary asked.

“Dang leg is driving me nuts,” Jack replied. “Must have stepped down on it wrong or something.”

“We’d better get you in town to see the doctor,” Mary suggested.

“It will be ok, Mary,” Jack insisted, “I don’t need to see a doctor.

Mary ignored Jack and made an appointment for the doctor to check Jack’s leg. When the day came to go to Meeker, Jack said he wasn’t going. Well, the kids hadn’t gone back to college just yet and I’ll bet you can guess how that worked out, huh? The doctor ordered an MRI on the leg so he could get a complete picture of what was going on inside. It was osteoarthritis, probably related to Jack’s leg injury. There is no cure for osteoarthritis, although many people can manage their symptoms with medication and lifestyle changes. Surgery was an option, if you only considered Jack’s age; but the doctor recommended against it. He would need a hip replacement and a knee replacement and the doctor wasn’t convinced it would be a good idea.

Starting the spring of 2025, Jack Summers wouldn’t be harvesting any more wood from the forest. Rob told him that he’d harvest enough each summer to keep them supplied but that was the end of the big-time firewood business. Jack could ride shotgun for him and he’d do maybe 250 cords, but surely no more, so that would make it a small-time business. Jack Summers was only 46 on his last birthday, and he was not a happy camper.

The firewood business had been good to Jack and Mary and they had money from both that and selling his outfitting business. They were a lot better off than he had realized and Mary told him that with what they had and what they could get off of ½ their regular production, they’d be in good shape. All of those years taking only a fraction of the income they’d earned from selling firewood were about to pay big dividends. The twins, she told him, had more than enough money for college anyway. And he knew how important it was to have someone riding shotgun in the forest, so he shouldn’t feel too bad about not being able to break his back anymore.

Depending upon how much wood they burned during the winter, they could have about 225 cords to sell. If the price held at \$250 a cord, they’d still be spitting \$52,000 five ways. They could live well on \$20,000 a year, what with the garden, the income from their savings and his disability pension. I warned you that plans would change over the next 3 years. In the spring of 2025, Sam and Rob got married. They could have waited, but they figured that they could get a small apartment in Colorado Springs and cut their expenses. They also decided that they’d stay in school until they both had those Master’s degrees and then move back to Meeker. They would be seniors in the fall and figured that the Master’s degrees would add about 2 more years.

Lane also decided that she'd be better off pursuing a Master's degree in Elementary Education. By 2025, the school systems required a master's degree if you wanted to be sure of getting a job. That would mean that come the spring of 2028, all three of the kids would be home and Jack could quit worrying about whatever it was that was bothering him. The Republican President had held onto the office by the skin of his teeth in 2020, but in November of 2024, that good-looking Democrat candidate got elected. Congress was about even divided, but slightly Democrat, very slightly.

You remember how those Environmentalists had made all kinds of threats about preventing the opening of that second oilfield in Alaska? They'd held off pending the outcome of the Supreme Court case and had lost. The court ruled that development of that second field in Alaska was in the national security interest. Anyone remember what Forest Taft did to the Aegis Refinery in *On Deadly Ground*? Those Environmentalists did; they apparently used it as a study guide. And the real life Michael Caine character didn't have R. Lee Ermey (a resident of Palmdale, CA) to bail him out either. Not that it had done Michael Caine much good in the movie. BTW, R. Lee Ermey is an Honorary Gunnery Sergeant. His US Marine Corps awards and decorations include: Meritorious Unit Commendation, Armed Forces Expeditionary Medal, National Defense Service Medal, Vietnam Service Medal (w/bronze service star), Vietnam Campaign Medal (w/60 Device), Vietnam Gallantry Cross (w/Palm), Good Conduct Medal (w/2 bronze service stars), Marksman Badge (w/Rifle Bar) and Sharpshooter Badge (w/Pistol Bar).

No, Jack didn't have much to worry about; just a bunch of Eco-terrorists running amok blowing things up was all. And, while they were at it, they attacked those unfinished nuclear reactors for good measure. And, you thought it was bad back in 2003! Even Forest Taft would have been surprised at these guys' ferocity. The US doesn't need to import terrorists; we have enough of the homegrown variety. Craig Rosebraugh was only 30 in 2003 when he leapt to the national attention (with ALF and ELF). That meant that he was only 52 in 2025. Hmm, I wonder if Gunny Ermey is available for a gig.

I warned you about things getting back to normal. Normal is decidedly un-normal if you know what I mean. In normal times, people do murder and blow up things and all sorts of nasty stuff. When the snow is deeper than 2 9' Indians standing one top of the other, normal stuff doesn't happen. That's why Jack was all worked up and equipping Lane and Rob like a couple of full-blown survivalists. He saw it coming from a long ways off. With Sam and Rob married, Lane thought it much more appropriate to spend the summer with Jack and Mary. Jack wasn't too happy with his role of riding shotgun and he let everyone know it. The doctor hadn't given him a choice and his limp was only getting worse.

He noticed on the Buffalo Bore website that they loaded a really hot load for the .458 Winchester rifle. He ordered a couple of boxes of the stuff and gave it a try. Since it didn't blow up the action of the model 70, he figured it was safe to use. You have had to see this to appreciate it. Jack was guarding Rob, all right. He had his Redhawk, his 12-gauge loaded with the 3" 1 $\frac{3}{8}$ ounce Brenneke Black Magic slugs and the .458 model 70. Winchester loads one bullet for the .458, a 510-grain Super-X soft point rated at 2040

fps and 4712 ft. lbs. of muzzle energy. Buffalo Bore has 3 loads: a 350 gr. JFN Expander-2550 fps 5052 ft. lbs.; a 400 gr. JRN Expander-2400 fps 5115 ft. lbs.; and, a 450 gr. JRN Expander-2250 fps 5058 ft. lbs. Guess which ammo he bought? (400 grain)

With the kids at home for the summer, Jack wasn't particularly worried about the Eco-terrorists. But, a 1,500-pound grizzly was plenty to worry about. He sort of figured on using the shotgun on black bear and the elephant gun on grizz. You do understand that his disability was probably affecting his thinking, right? Jack had plenty of time to think, sitting there watching Rob cutting up logs. He realized how lucky Mary and he were to have Rob and Lane as children and now to have Sam as a daughter-in-law. Rob had done pretty well with Sam. It was a shame about Andy, but he'd always been leery of Andy because of Andy's attitude about guns. Lane would take her time and find the right guy. Hell. He probably was right there in Meeker.

Sneak peek-he wasn't but he would be. Ranger alerted yanking Jack out of his reverie. It was a black bear, but that bear didn't seem to be too interested in them. He picked up the gun, just in case, and followed the bear as it ambled across the clearing and left. That was one lucky bear, because Jack had been distracted and inadvertently picked up the elephant gun. 2½ tons of energy hitting that bear would have all but blown it into the next County. He'd have to be more careful about getting lost in thought.

Mary had only taken orders for 200 cords, explaining that Jack was forced to retire due to a medical condition. Two hundred cords were nothing compared to previous years, but there was only one man in the woods doing the cutting and Jack couldn't leave to drive in the loads of logs because he was riding shotgun. Rob just cut the wood and left it lay. Periodically, Sam and Lane would come out with the pickup and trailer and haul in wood for a day or two until they had all they could handle. Then, they helped Mary split until they were well ahead and begin making deliveries. By the 4th of July, they had both homes stocked with firewood and about ⅔ of their orders delivered.

As had become custom, they butchered chickens around the 4th of July. Jack rode shotgun for this event, too, in case another black bear showed up. He passed on raising hogs this year because they had plenty of pork. They had plenty of about everything except firewood and they were getting close on that. I suppose that Jack was probably feeling guilty about not helping. He should have remembered what he'd told Lane way back when and he might have felt better. Or maybe not. The end of August rolled in all too quickly to suit Jack. But, Rob had cut their firewood and 225 cords more. The final tally was 225 cords at \$235 per cord net or \$52,875. Each share was \$10,575, more than enough for them to live on (\$21,150).

"You kids be careful this year at school," Jack said. "I don't expect we'll have any problems with those Eco-terrorists, but that nuclear plant near Boulder is something they might hit. I bought you each a recalibrated Civil Defense Survey meter and dosimeters, just in case. Add those to you BOB or vehicle's emergency kit."

"Relax Dad, we'll be careful," Rob said.

"I'm more worried about Lane, Rob, and careful has nothing to do with it. This bunch of yahoos could really cause trouble."

"I'll be careful, too, Dadfy," Lane assured him. "There probably wouldn't be a nuclear explosion, they almost have Rocky Flats cleaned up."

"I know, Lane, but..." Jack started to say.

"Lane is right Dad," Rob said. "Rocky Flats was scheduled for completion in 2021 and they're only a little behind. I'll tell you what, you stay here and worry about us and we'll go back to school and worry about Mom and you 15 miles from town in the middle of a snowstorm."

"I guess you've been told, Jack," Mary smiled.

"But Mary," Jack protested, "Things are getting back to normal and normal isn't good. We had a bunch of incidents back when things were normal."

"We had a bunch of incidents just gathering firewood and butchering chickens," she reminded him.

"Just be careful," Jack said putting an end to the discussion.

Rob and Sam had driven over to Colorado Springs about a month earlier and rented a furnished apartment. The truck was loaded down with some of their wedding presents; not many, but enough for them to get by. All three kids had applied to and been tentatively accepted by the Graduate schools on their campus. Lane was getting a MA degree in Elementary Education, Rob a MS in Computer Science and Sam a MA in Liberal Arts plus she was taking extra classes so she could teach. Well they were off now, going to Meeker and down to I-70 and over to Denver. And then, Rob and Sam would continue to Colorado Springs.

As a parting gift for Sam, Mary had shown up carrying a box and a bag.

"Sam, this was my mother's Redhawk," Mary said. "She only ever fired it on the range, so it's in good condition. The holster, speed loaders, cleaning kit and some ammo are in the bag. I put in her belt, too but you may need to get a new, smaller size. I think that Jack is nuts, but in case I'm wrong, you'll be as well armed as Rob."

"Thanks, Mary," Sam said. "I'll get Rob to teach me to shoot it."

Sam may have appeared to be one of those sheeple, but she most certainly wasn't. She'd taken to the rifles and handguns like a fish to water. She was a lot like the kids in most ways, totally practical and she'd picked up a whole lot of skills she'd never dreamed she'd learn when she graduated from High School. Andy, on the other hand,

had turned out to be a total liberal and was afraid of the guns even though he'd gone along and learned to shoot them. But, good old Andy had a fatal character flaw, he thought with the wrong head. And worse, he didn't really use the head on top of his shoulders for anything except math. Lane had done well to dump him.

The next generation didn't make an appearance until Christmas vacation, 2025. Mary was hoping that Sam was expecting, but Rob and Sam had decided to wait until they were back in the Meeker area before starting a family. Stopping early with the wood harvest had left Jack with an inordinate amount of free time on his hands. He'd taken to surfing the web, trying to fill his days. The problem was that the more Jack looked around, the more he realized that the people out there were just plain crazy. That politician in the White House seemed to be trying to do the right thing by the country, but with such a narrow margin in Congress, he wasn't getting any legislation passed.

The Supreme Court had finally decided that the words 'Under God' could stay in the Pledge of Allegiance. It was either that or reprint and re-coin all of the money and change all of the oaths of office. Separation of religion and state didn't mean what the people thought it meant, they said. It only meant that the state couldn't interfere with religion. By inference, that meant that prayer could be allowed in schools. For the state/federal government to do otherwise would be a clear interference. In another hotly discussed case, they ruled that the freedom of speech had limitations and that the media wasn't free to say anything they wanted. They could only report the truth, not speculate. They still refused to take any additional 2nd Amendment cases.

While they were home on Christmas vacation, the Sheriff of Rio Blanco County had designated Rob, Sam and Lane as Special Reserve Deputies. Since they owned Janice's house now and had all of that comm. gear, he said it only made sense. It didn't seem to make much difference to the man either that the kids still had 2½ years of college to complete or that Lane would probably be living in Meeker. The Sheriff arranged for them to take the necessary classes in Denver or Colorado Springs so that they would have full powers of their office. The kids aced the special weapons class he'd arranged and shot better than most of his Deputies, Sam especially.

"So, this is the last term until you get those Bachelor's degrees, huh?" Jack observed. "I'll just be glad when you've finished with college. The more I see on the web the more frightened that I become. I'm telling you, people are nuts."

"It would be a lot better, except for the politicians," Sam said. "We were talking in a Political Science class how the politicians all seem to have some sort of agenda that has nothing to do with what's good for the country."

"You had to go to college to figure that out?" Jack laughed out loud. "Sam, it is common knowledge that the average politician is an enemy of the people."

"Not all of them, Dad," Lane disagreed.

“You’re right, Lane,” Jack said. “Not all of them, but probably most of them, if I’m any judge. It was the same when I was in college majoring in history and the country hasn’t learned a thing in almost 25 years. We may not be at war with any foreign country, but we’re warring among ourselves.”

“Farmer’s Almanac says we’re only going to get 8’ of snow this year,” Rob injected, changing the subject of the conversation.

“It also says that it will be just as cold this year as last,” Jack countered. “We could sell 600 cords of firewood easy if I wasn’t all crippled up.”

“So, get that surgery done,” Rob recommended. “I know that the doctor recommended against it but that’s just one man’s opinion. If you have it done now, you might be fit by spring.”

The Loner – Chapter 25 – A Different Kind of Animal

Jack did just that. He went to Denver and had his hip and knee replaced. Then he went through some excruciating physical therapy learning to walk all over again. And, the limp was almost gone, miracle of miracles. They had told him that it would take about 3 months to be fully recovered, but it had taken 4. Probably because he had 2 joints replaced instead of one. Jack had a total hip replacement and an artificial knee installed. The hip replacement was permanent, but they told him that the knee was only good for about 10-15 years.

Over the years, the grizzly bear had reestablished itself in Colorado and for the first time in over 100 years, packs of wolves had been noted. Previously, grizzly bears had only been present in any concentration in places like Yellowstone. And the wolves had been mostly in Canada and the northern tier of states. Apparently they didn’t like the cold weather either and had moved south to warmer climes. What can I say, Mother Nature was restoring the balance and that went a lot further than just replacing the ice caps.

The ranchers didn’t much care for the presence of wolves, but the Department of Agriculture and the Department of Interior got together and came up with an indemnity program to cover the ranchers’ losses and to protect the wolf. The penalties associated with killing a wolf were severe enough that it was just a whole lot easier for the ranchers to file an insurance claim. You could still kill a wolf, but only in legitimate self-defense and you’d better have witnesses. In North America there have been very few documented cases of a healthy wild wolf ever attacking or killing a human being. Why is it then, when people think of wolves, they think of horrendous killers, attacking humans without mercy?

“It sure is nice to have a chainsaw back in my hands,” Jack observed.

“How many cords of firewood did Mom contract for this year?” Rob asked.

“500,” Jack replied.

“I think that she maybe went a little overboard,” Rob suggested.

“I’m back to 100%,” Jack said. “We’ll be alright as long as we don’t lose a lot of time fighting off bears.”

“Is that why you brought Champ instead of Ranger?” Rob asked.

“He needs the experience,” Jack pointed out.

Without realizing it, Jack had made one of the best decisions of his life. Ranger wasn’t professionally trained, but Champ was. They were out there cutting up deadfalls a mile a minute and were way ahead of schedule. Because spring had come early, Jack and Mary had the garden in by the time the kids showed up from school. So, Jack and Rob started the minute Rob showed up and Sam and Lane hauled wood to the house. It got to be late June and they were just about to knock off for a couple of days for the annual chicken harvest when one day Champ suddenly braced and let out a low growl. Rob caught Champ out of the corner of his eye and stopped his chainsaw and reached for his Redhawk.

“I wouldn’t do that if I were you,” a voice called out.

Rob froze and Jack noticing stopped his chainsaw and went for his Redhawk.

“I said, that I wouldn’t if I were you,” the voice repeated.

“Who the hell are you and what do you want?” Jack asked.

“We’re environmentalists,” the man said, “Just what do you think you’re doing?”

“We’re cutting up deadfalls for firewood, if it’s any of your business,” Jack explained.

“We have a permit from the Forest Service. Why don’t you show yourself mister? Champ, stay.”

“You keep that dog off us or its dead,” the man said.

Three men walked out into the open. They were armed, 2 with short barreled shotguns and one with an AR15. Champ didn’t move a muscle, but you could see he was ready to attack. He was almost coiled, like a spring.

“I don’t care if you have a permit or not mister,” the man said, “You’re harvesting timber on public land.”

“Only deadfalls,” Rob pointed out.

“The animals need cover and removing all of the deadfalls is removing that cover,” the man insisted.

“Listen mister, you picked the wrong people to mess with,” Jack said. “We’re both Rio Blanco County Deputy Sheriff’s and everything we’re doing is on the up and up and in accordance for the plan for the White River National Forest.”

“That’s just the government’s idea of what’s right for this forest,” the man snapped. “We’ll be the judges of what’s right and wrong.”

About that time a cough from a nearby area announced the presence of a grizzly bear. Rob and Jack recognized the sound immediately and froze. Champ sensed, more than knew, that something wasn’t right and began to growl again. The Eco-terrorist leader assumed that Champ was growling at him and started to point his rifle at the dog. Before he could shoot, that grizz came charging out of the bushes going 35 mph and bowled him over, then turned and gave him a swat with its big, ugly paw. The other two men were frozen in fear and were slow to bring their shotguns to bear on the grizz. Rob and Jack took advantage of the distraction and grabbed for their Redhawks, but held fire. The bear laid a massive paw on first one and then the other of the two men. Then, it froze and contemplated Jack and Rob. It reared up on its hind legs and clawed the air obviously attempting to frighten them.

It was working, too, but Jack and Rob waited for that bear to drop down and charge before they shot it. Didn’t happen. The bear growled and made mincemeat out of the air but since they were frozen in place, it eventually dropped to the ground and ambled off. It looked over its shoulder a couple of times and gave a gruff or cough, but left.

“Son of a Bitch,” Jack cursed.

“They’re still alive, Dad,” Rob said examining the three men.

“Secure their weapons and I’ll call the Sheriff from the pickup,” Jack advised.

“They’re bleeding pretty badly,” Rob said.

“Yeah, well my heart’s bleeding for them,” Jack snapped. “Those SOB’s pointed guns at us Rob. Screw ‘em, I left the first aid kit at home. Where’s your GPS, I’ll need it to get the coordinates for the Sheriff?”

“My fanny pack is in the pickup,” Rob said.

Jack radioed the Sheriff and gave them exact coordinates. This time a chopper was available, it figures doesn’t it, and it showed up before the 3 men bled to death. Jack had emptied his shotgun and refilled it with 3” 15-pellet 00 buckshot in case any of the three dying men got any ideas. The paramedic in the chopper quickly bound the men’s

wounds, keeping them from bleeding to death. They loaded them into the chopper and one Deputy stayed behind to take a report about what happened. Jack told him exactly what happened, not leaving out a word. The Deputy asked why he hadn't treated the men's wounds and Jack said that he'd left his first aid kit at home. About the time the Deputy finished up, a patrol car arrived on the scene to take the Deputy back to Meeker. Jack and Rob decided to call it a day and returned to the cabin.

"You're back early," Mary said. "Another grizzly bear?"

"Well, in a manner of speaking, yes," Jack laughed. "First time in my life that I ever wanted to give a grizzly bear a hug."

"Huh? What are you talking about, Jack?" she asked. "Was the sun too much for you?"

Rob told his mom the entire story. When he finished, Mary, Lane and Sam's mouths were in the fly catching position. Mary was the first one to speak, observing that men with that kind of luck ought to get in a car and drive to Las Vegas. The Sheriff called a while later and told them that the men were in the hospital and under arrest for Assault with a Deadly Weapon. Jack figured that since the men hadn't actually tried to kill them, just threatened to, that ADW was a reasonable charge. That grizzly bear had inflicted a lot of damage on all three of them and even after they healed up, they wouldn't be a pretty sight. There are no plastic surgeons in prisons.

Jack had raised 2 hogs this year because they were finally short on pork. The farmer who sold him the pigs said that he'd have a market weight beef ready towards fall and Jack told him he would take it. They finally knocked off and butchered the 78 chickens and 24 stewing hens around the 4th of July. By that time, probably because Jack was up to full steam, they had cut 175 cords of wood. They still had 7 weeks to cut enough wood to fill the orders Mary had taken for the 500 cords... probably not enough time, but they'd give it their best shot.

By late August when it was time for the three youngsters to take off for Grad school, they had only managed to cut 450 cords and a lot of that was lying in the forest, waiting to be picked up. Mary and Jack worked 6½ days a week hauling, splitting and delivering, taking only time out Sunday mornings for church. It took them all September and October and part of November to finish up the orders and put in their supply of wood for the winter. One thing about Jack was that the most wood he'd ever burned was about 20 cords any heating season. But, he always kept a reserve of 5 cords. Five cords of lumber is a heck of a pile of wood and if push came to shove, Rob's house had a full woodpile.

The house that Lane had inherited from Janice and traded to Rob had a wood furnace and an electric stove. It also had the fireplace with the 'Franklin Stove'. With all of those heat sources, the cabin was very warm and comfortable during the coldest winter, unlike Jack and Mary's cabin, which depended only on the 'Franklin Stove' and the wood-burning kitchen stove. Back when they'd put in the wind turbine, they'd talked about

adding electric baseboard heat but hadn't done it. With two sources of electricity and more power than they could use, Jack suggested to Mary that maybe it was time to add those baseboard heaters. He was getting older, he allowed, and his circulation wasn't quite what it had been 20 odd years before.

It takes approximately 8 watts of energy per square foot to heat a home if your only source of heat is the baseboard heaters. And, a baseboard heater puts out about 240-250 watts per foot of length. They didn't really need any sort of permanent installation, just some portable baseboard type units to ward off the chill. They picked up one for each room and two for the main room at a store in Meeker. When the cabin had been wired at the time they put in the solar panels, Jack had gone overboard, as usual, when he'd put in the outlets. It paid off now because each room was a separate circuit and there was plenty of power to spare out of the electrical panel.

"That's better, Mary," Jack said. "I think that I'm warm for the first winter in 3 years."

"That's nice Jack. What do you want to get Rob and Sam and Lane for Christmas?" Mary asked.

"I don't know, Mary," Jack said. "They don't need anything and I've about exhausted getting them survivalist supplies. Don't you have any ideas?"

"Wouldn't have asked you if I did," she replied. "We can always buy them some clothes, I suppose."

Oh, by the way, the split for 2026 was based on 450 cords at \$235 a cord net divided 5 ways or \$21,150 apiece or \$42,300 per couple. Add to that the 50 extra cords that Jack and Mary had harvested on their own, another \$11,750, and you can see that money wasn't the issue. Instead of their bank accounts shrinking, the kids were actually gaining. And, Jack and Mary bought another \$40,000 CD. These people were definitely living on the cheap. Of course, that was all for the better, that forest could catch fire, again, and they could lose their source of income for a year, or maybe two. It wasn't like Jack really had a profession unless it was that of producing firewood and that was mostly backbreaking labor of the most manual kind. Manual labor is an honorable pursuit, but it's hard on you and takes its toll over time. So does dodging bears and terrorists.

When the kids came home for Christmas, they received some rather nice clothes. Jack had the hogs butchered and smoked the center cut pork loins on the second hog the same as when he'd done two hogs before. He'd also picked up the beef from the locker plant and Christmas dinner was a standing rib roast. He'd had it cut special, just to have something a little different for Christmas. Lane still wasn't looking for a new beau, but she did have a 4.0gpa. In Grad school you are expected to maintain a minimum of a 3.0gpa. Because she was taking extra classes it was all that Sam could do to maintain a 3.5 and Rob had slipped to a 3.8.

With the hip and knee replacements, Jack found that he was a little spryer than before

and during the early months of 2027, when they weren't playing patty cake, Jack and Mary got out to the woods in the Snow Cat. Let me tell you, these women who look like Kathy Ireland age well! Jack decided to try skiing on those artificial joints. It worked to a point, but he decided that at his age he should just confine himself to the Snow Cat. He didn't even bother to try the snowshoes. Now, they hadn't been hunting for quite some time, what with raising pork and chickens and buying beef on the hoof. Still, Jack found that he didn't really miss hunting as much as he thought he would. They did make it a point to get out on the range and shoot every month.

Over the course of time, they pulled their old food from the shelter and used it up, replacing it with the stuff that Janice had in her basement. By this point in time, that basement was about half empty. The ammo that Janice had bought had all been match ammo from Black Hills Ammo Co. Keeping in practice, Jack noticed that they had finally burned up most of the old surplus stuff and he replaced it all with new ammo from Black Hills. All of the 7.62 ammo was match grade 175gr BTHP and the 5.56 was remanufactured stuff. Black Hills only loaded .30-06 Gold Line Hunting ammo, so he bought Winchester USA 151gr FMJ for the Garand and an assortment of Silver Tip hunting ammo in various bullet weights for the model 70's. He stored all of the ammo in surplus GI ammo cans with desiccant packs.

As with the previous year, by the time school was out and the 'kids' returned home, that garden was already in and Jack and Mary had been to the woods cutting up timber. Funny how parents always think of their youngsters as 'kids' even when they're 23 years old. Getting out as they had put Jack and Mary way ahead of the curve on their firewood. Jack told Mary that the previous year had been tough and that they needed to do the extra work in the spring instead of the fall. They had the last week of April, all of May and were in the first week of June when the family arrived. Mary immediately set Lane to hauling in wood, Sam to tending the garden and sent Rob and Jack out to cut timber.

The winter of 2026-2027 had been marginally warmer, perhaps finally signaling an end to the cold weather. Jack and Rob took Champ again just in case any more of those eco-terrorists showed up, although given a preference they would have taken that grizzly to cover their six. Be careful what you wish for fellas, God has a sense of humor... Jack decided that they definitely didn't need pork this year and that maybe they could fill in their meat stocks with game, so the only thing he got were chickens and laying hens. If that wolverine had been back, he, or she, hadn't been able to get through the fencing on the side of the new chicken coop.

Well, no bear showed up, at least not before the 4th of July. Don't you just love family traditions? Of course plucking chickens doesn't rise to my top ten when it comes to traditions, family or otherwise. Jeez, do you realize that next year (2028) when the kids return home from college for good, Jack will be 50 years old? Don't worry about it Jack, they call that middle age. But, I have an idea; since Rob is a computer scientist; couldn't he make more money programming and consulting and just buy firewood? He could,

but then he'd have to make an awfully lot of money to replace what he'd be losing.

The Loner – Chapter 26 – A Family Reunited

“We’ve got 200 cords cut,” Rob said while plucking yet another chicken. “How much are we committed to this year?”

“Same as last, 500 cords,” Jack said, “But your’ Mom and I got a jump on it this year so we can knock off in October. I want to go hunting this fall and get a deer or elk.”

“What ever happened to those guys that jumped us last year?” Rob asked.

“They won’t be bothering anyone else for a long time, Rob,” Jack said. “When I identified us as peace officers, they continued their behavior. That made all subsequent acts an assault on a peace officer under Colorado statutes.”

“That’s worse, huh?” Rob asked.

“Oh yeah,” Jack said. “A whole lot worse.”

“But we weren’t on duty,” Rob pointed out.

“That doesn’t matter Rob,” Jack said. “As long as they knew or had reason to believe that we were peace officers, they come under that statute. That’s what the courts have ruled.”

“I’ll sure be happy when I finish up Grad school,” Rob said.

“Why’s that?” Jack asked.

“I’ve about finished up the classes and just getting anxious, I guess,” Rob explained.

“Wanting to get that family started?”

“That, too,” Rob grinned. “When we come home next spring to stay, we’ll probably already have a start on that.”

“That’s the last chicken,” Jack noted. “We’ll get back into the woods tomorrow and see how close we can get to 500 cords before you go back to school.”

They had 480 cords of wood cut, much of it still in the forest when the kid’s vehicles pulled out in late August. That meant that they only needed 20 more to fill the orders and 11 cords for themselves. Jack had been wrong; they had the wood cut and all hauled by the end of September and everything delivered before the first of November. It took a little longer than he had planned, but they were done ahead of the previous year. 480 at \$235 net made a single share \$22,560 and a couples share \$45,120. The extra 20 cords gave Jack and Mary an extra \$4,700. It all went into the checking account.

“What are we going to do for Christmas this year, Jack?” Mary asked.

“Didn’t we just have this conversation, dear?” Jack retorted.

“That was a year ago,” Mary laughed.

“Well, same question, same answer,” Jack said, “Go buy them some clothes. Now this time next year, you might get to buy something different. Rob told me that when they came home next spring they might have a start on a family.”

“That won’t change much next year, Jack, what can you really buy a little baby besides clothes and some simple toys?” Mary commented. “It will be the year after that and later that will be more fun, grandpa.”

“God that makes me feel old,” Jack laughed.

“You will be 50 in March, but you’re not getting old, you’re just getting better,” she smiled.

“Only until that replacement knee wears out,” Jack mumbled. “I can’t believe that in a little over a month it will be 2028. And it will be Presidential election year again.”

“Know who you’re going to vote for this coming year?” Mary asked.

“You know me dear, I’m a dyed in the wool Republican, which is probably odd for a history major, but, I think I’m going to give that Democrat in the White House another shot at it,” Jack said. “He’s got some good programs but he can’t get them through Congress.”

“It reminds me of 2011 and 2012,” Mary said.

“We don’t have the unrest brewing this time around, Mary,” Jack said, “So don’t go looking for the beginning of another Revolution. We came close enough last time. I still worried about those North Koreans and the Iranians and their darned nukes.”

“You know that Lane told me that they finally finished Rocky Flats so we don’t have that worry anymore,” Mary pointed out.

“Yeah, she told me the same thing,” Jack said. “And, there are no nearby reactors, either.”

Why all the discussion of nuclear wars and such, is the lid about to blow off the kettle? About as likely as it was in 2004 and would remain as long as anyone possessed nuclear weapons. All it takes is one crackpot in a position of power to push the button that launches the missile that starts that war. But there are many crackpots around with their

finger on the button, now aren't there? And, this was about 24 years into the story of one man's family (remember that radio show?) and what he had to do to exist in a failing democracy. Why failing? In all the history of the world, democracies always failed. They may or may not be a good thing, I think the former; BUT PEOPLE run them.

And there is always hatred somewhere in the world. Pick a place, any place, it doesn't matter and I'll find the hatred and anger for you. The source of all of this hatred and anger might very well be something as obvious as the 7 deadly sins. Think about that for a minute. Either that or some form of delusion labeled 'idealism'.

Over Christmas Rob notified the family that Sam was expecting and the baby was due around the 4th of July. Lane met with the Meeker Board of Education and confirmed that she had a job for the following fall. She told a local realtor to be on the lookout for a home for her, she could pay cash if necessary. While she was in for that interview, she met another new teacher who would be starting the next fall, too. His name was Don Adams (no relation to the comedian). They even went out for coffee. He was 2 years older than she and had taught in Denver for 2 years. He didn't think much of living in Denver, and said he was from Durango.

Mary didn't say much about the baby, but she seemed to have a glow about her. She probably started making plans the moment she heard. She did have that sewing machine, although the only time she used it was for a hurry up repair of a piece of clothing. Rob brought up the subject of that communications center that Janice had and Jack told him it wasn't hard to get a license. He had already studied and got a Technician license and as soon as he could master the material was going for a General. He suggested that if Rob had any free time, he do the same. Lane overheard their conversation but didn't say anything to Jack. She asked Mary what Jack had used to study and Mary gave him Jack's spare copy of the CD containing the study material. When Jack went to get the CD to give to Rob, he couldn't find it and assumed he'd misplaced it. No biggie, he just burnt a new copy.

The kids ended up leaving to return to school early when news of a big storm hit the weather channel on TV. They hadn't had a blizzard in a fairly long time because although they still got plenty of snow, they never got the snow and the wind together. The storm blew in earlier than expected and Jack got a call from the Sheriff. There was a group of cross-country skiers missing in the White River National Forest and he wondered if Jack could fire up his Snow Cat and look for them. The forest is a big place to search, but the winds wouldn't permit the Sheriff to put up the chopper. Jack got their planned route and Mary and he set off to look for them.

Jack had filled up the fuel tank on the Snow Cat and stuck in a few extra cans of fuel. Mary brewed them one of those large jugs of coffee and they headed for the skiers beginning point. This was one case where GPS equipment proved to be invaluable. They got the coordinates of the starting point off of a map and used the GPS to get them there. Visibility was really bad because of the blowing snow. On the second day of searching, the wind and snow let up briefly and a party of Forest Rangers found the

missing people. They called the Sheriff and the Sheriff contacted Jack on the handi talkie. That repeater that Janice had put in was proving to be really useful. Jack and Mary diverted to the coordinates the Sheriff gave them and loaded the people into their Snow Cat. You'll remember it was a French 10-passenger 1990 Poncin Minibus.

"I was beginning to think that we weren't particularly useful any more, Mary," Jack said. "All we seem to get done is cutting firewood and butchering chickens anymore."

"Jack a fast paced life full of adventure only occurs in the movies," she replied. "We've had our share of adventures and if nothing else, helping out those skiers should have made the point that life is fairly mundane. We seem to experience months of the routine interspersed with moments of sheer terror."

"I burned Rob a copy of that Ham study guide. I couldn't find my spare copy," he said.

"I gave your spare copy to Lane to study, I guess I forgot to tell you," she explained.

"You know, now that Rob and Lane are grown up, that shelter is a little small," Jack observed. "How about we double the size of it and make the new section into sleeping quarters?"

"Are you going to try and do that yourself?" she asked.

"No, we can hire it done and just add 3 walls," he said. "The contractor can cut in a doorway between the two sections. But, that will let us put in a bathroom with a shower. We can move our bedroom out of the expansion and into the new section and use that bedroom for additional storage. That ought to free up more room in the main shelter."

"Sounds like you pretty much have it figured out," Mary said.

"Well, I had to do something to fill the time," Jack laughed.

"Sure, I suppose we'd better do that with the kids moving back home," she agreed. "Did Lane mention that fella she met? I think she said his name was Don Adams and he's starting teaching in Meeker next fall the same as she is."

"Lane and I didn't really get much of a chance to visit," Jack conceded. "I get in touch with a contractor and have him start that expansion as soon as the ground thaws."

Mary got to thinking that once the expansion of the shelter was completed, they could move the kids full-sized beds out of the cabin and into the shelter. That meant less furniture to buy and would free up those two bedrooms for other uses. She wanted to set up a sewing room and figured that Jack could put in a desk or a workbench, or both, and move his gun safe into his room. She also had a sneaking suspicion that it wouldn't be too long before he wanted to put in some Ham radios in the house. There were actually two sets of antennas on that monopole, one for Janice's house and the other for the

shelter. It shouldn't be too hard for him to put in a remote controlled switches in the shelter and run lines to the cabin.

With Sam expecting, she probably wouldn't be as much help, or even any, in the garden. Mary suggested to Jack that they cut back their firewood production for the summer of 2028 and concentrate on all of their other projects. Did I mention that he got an elk? Probably slipped my mind. Took it to Meeker for aging and butchering. They had gone to Denver to watch Lane get her Bachelor's degree so this time around they went to Colorado Spring and watched Rob and Sam get their Master's degrees at the Commencement Exercise. By this time, Sam was as big as a barn.

The garden was in and coming along quite well before they left. Lane didn't have much stuff to move back to the cabin but Rob had to rent a small trailer. The contractor already had the hole excavated, the pipes in and he was putting up the block walls for the shelter expansion. Jack wasn't quite as convinced as Mary that they would need to cut production all that much on the firewood. He upped the number of chickens and had bought one hog to feed. This ought to prove interesting with Sam due about the time they usually butchered chickens. Rob worked hard in the woods, but Jack could see that he was distracted. Finally in late June the call came on the radio that Sam had gone into labor. It turned out to be false labor and they lost one day getting her to the hospital and thoroughly checked out. Everything was fine according to the doctor and she'd be right on schedule or perhaps even a few days late since this was her first child.

Lane closed on a house in Meeker. It was an older home with a full basement, wood heat and an attic. She put 50% down and got a bank loan to finance the balance. Which was rather easy considering the balance of her checking account and the CD that was now in her name. Things were rather busy out at the cabin, so Lane got a decorator to spruce the place up and picked out all new furniture at the store. She stayed at the cabin until her home was done and worked her butt off trying to get garden harvested and canned, wood delivered and wood hauled in from the forest.

They stopped and harvested the chickens the week of the 4th of July. Lane's house was done, and they all went in to have a look when Sam had a doctor's appointment. Nice house, but Jack felt it was missing something. He called the gun store and had them deliver a gun safe. Rob had gotten an Amateur Extra Class license as had Lane. Jack was just grateful that he'd gotten his General. He suggested to Lane that she consider putting in a Sheriff's Department radio and a 2-meter rig. They got almost all of the way back to the cabin when Sam went into labor for real. So they turned around and headed right back to Meeker. Rob and Mary stayed at the hospital with Sam and Jack took Lane and bought her the radios he'd mentioned earlier in the day. The store said that they could come out and install antennas for Lane and she told them where she wanted them.

After a protracted labor, Sam delivered up a healthy 6-pound 8-ounce baby boy. They had decided to name him Robert John. If the baby had been a girl, the name would have been Lane Mary. That blew that week right out of the water. The following week

they were back at it and by this time had restocked Rob and Jack's woodpiles and hauled 25 cords into Meeker for Lane's home. Plus, they'd delivered about 50 cords of wood. They continued right up to the first of September and then paused to process all of the timber they'd cut. They only sold 250 cords of wood during the summer of 2028, but it had been a busy summer.

When Lane moved into town, they moved her bed to the shelter and set up Jack's 'office'. He had a small workbench, a desk, and a Ham setup just like Mary thought he would. Jack had bought himself a scanner, police radio and a 2-meter rig for his office. He couldn't see spending extra money on additional radios. This summer had proven to be fairly expensive and they ended up breaking about even. Those 250 cords went for \$235 net and they spit the money 4 ways this year, giving them \$14,687.50 for Rob and Lane and \$29,275 for Jack and Mary. Between the communications gear, the shelter expansion and so forth, they had spent \$16,000, leaving them about the usual amount to last them for the next year. It all went in the checking account, again.

Lane started teaching in Meeker and she had a 5th grade class. Don had a 6th grade class. After a few conversations in the teacher's lounge, Lane and Don started dating. Rob contacted several firms in Denver and managed to pick up some small contracts that would keep him busy through the winter. And, Sam had her hands full with Robbie. Shakespeare went to town with Lane and Ranger went to live with Rob and Sam, leaving Champ with Jack and Mary.

The Loner – Chapter 27 – The Rounded out Family

The winter of 2028-2029 saw about the 'normal' amount of snow, but the temperatures were still way down. Nothing like the previous years when they'd set new lows, but enough that the firewood was getting burned up at a respectable pace. For Christmas, they bought Robbie one of those Tupperware balls with the different shaped blocks and Sam and Rob bought him one of those rocking posts with stacking rings. There were all kinds of clothing being exchanged. And, Lane had brought Don for Thanksgiving, but he went home to Durango for Christmas.

"So, are Don and you an item?" Jack asked.

"Oh Daddy, that's an awful question," Lane said. "We're dating regularly, if that's what you mean."

"Gonna get hitched?" Jack asked.

"After my experience with Andy, I'm not going to rush into anything," Lane countered.

"You're not getting any younger," Jack persisted.

"I'm only 25," Lane said.

"So Don is a 6th grade teacher, huh?" Jack remarked.

"Yes Dad, he graduated from the University of Colorado in Denver in 2024 and got his Master's degree in Elementary Education in 2026. Then, he taught in Denver for 2 years. He's 5'11" tall and weighs about 165 pounds. His hobbies are skiing and hunting," Lane reeled off. "His parents and sister live in Durango and his sister's name is Janet. Anything else you want to know?"

"A hunter, huh?" Jack said.

"Yes, he is both a bow hunter and rifle hunter," Lane responded. "Says he uses a shotgun, too."

"Well, if he's a bow hunter, then he knows his way around the woods," Jack observed.

"Then does he meet with your approval?" Lane snapped, "Or should I just dump him?"

"He sounds as if he's everything that Andy wasn't," Mary remarked.

"He's really nice Mom, even if Daddy doesn't approve," Lane cooed.

“I didn’t say that I didn’t approve of him Lane, but I barely know the guy,” Jack said. “Anyway, it doesn’t matter what I think about him. The only thing that matters is whether the two of you get along.”

“I think we’re very compatible Daddy,” Lane smirked.

Jack wasn’t quite sure what she meant by that remark and decided that he didn’t want to know, either. Lane had chosen her words carefully and was shining Jack on, but he didn’t know that. Maybe if he were worried that she was sleeping with the guy, he’d mind his own business. Anyway, her comment had shut Jack up. They still had those snowmobiles that the Sheriff had signed out to them and Jack gave Rob 2 and Lane the other two. The same applied to the 4 ATV’s the Sheriff had given to them. His snow cat was nothing but a 10-passenger ATV with removable treads.

The kids’ added sleds and trailers to their go anywhere vehicles so that if push came to shove they could move around and take their emergency supplies with them. Lane also traded in her SUV for a 4-wheel drive club cab pickup with a diesel motor. Rob’s old truck had seen better days, but it was good enough to use in the firewood business. So, the spring of 2029, he also bought a new club cab 4-wheel drive pickup with a diesel engine. In view of Jack’s attitude about vehicles, they rep-laced the alternator with a generator and added a second and a second battery, auxiliary fuel tanks, box liners and toolboxes that could double as gun safes and haul the emergency equipment.

Over time, Jack had refined those bags of emergency stuff that the kids had in their vehicles. One bag was strictly for the vehicle and it contained spare hoses, belts and fuses along with the toolkit, tow strap, etc. Everything else went into the BOB. And those BOB’s were something else. They were no longer really 72-hour kits, more like 144-hour kits. Which, when one considers that Rob and Lane and families were now back in Meeker, were probably overkill. That Democrat had gotten reelected for a second term and Congress was slightly more Democrats than before, or did I mention that?

When Lane and Rob got new vehicles, Jack made up an entirely new emergency kit for Rob’s new pickup and swapped out things in Lane’s. It gave him something to do during the winter. He also set up a program on his laptop and inventoried the contents of the shelter. With the additional storage place created by emptying out their bedroom he was able to put the remainder of Janice’s supplies in the shelter. Everything they had down in the shelter was categorized and had an expiration date, allowing Jack to replace any outdated supplies. This was particularly important for medical items and periodically, he had to replace the D5W, Ringer’s, Lactated Ringers and Normal Saline IVs. He’d worked with the doctor and a druggist in Meeker and the expiration date everything bore was their real expiration dates, not what the manufacturer recommended. They added D5NS to the IV solutions. The problem was there were over 200 different IV solutions and the 5 they had were a good start.

Having 3 pickups in the business and 3 250 cubic foot trailers really made a difference the following spring. Rob and Jack were out before the snow was entirely melted and

the ground was still partly frozen. They each took a truck and trailer and hauled in 6 cords of logs a day. Mary ended up splitting logs long before she could even think about getting the garden in. Sam told Mary not to worry about the garden because without the belly, she could handle the entire thing, including the rototilling. She helped Mary by making deliveries. By the time the ground was soft and dry enough to till, they had replaced all of their firewood, including Lane's and had delivered a fair amount. Mary could split firewood about twice as fast as one man could cut it and she kept almost even with the guys.

Then, school let out for the summer and Lane got into the act. One of the locals who had a splitter had retired and they picked it up for a reasonable price. You may recall that Jack had thought about a second splitter, but had never in fact bought it. Mary and Lane darn near ran Sam ragged because when she wasn't doing something in the garden or tending to Robbie, she was loading the spilt wood and making deliveries. Of course the garden started to mature and from that point on, Lane alternated between splitting and delivering the firewood. Then, one day out of the blue, Don showed up and offered to help. It was really bad timing on his part because it was chicken time.

To make a short story shorter, they got the chickens plucked and in the freezer and Jack went around looking for a 4th trailer. Bought one from the same guy who sold them the splitter. Well now, with Mary and Sam keeping pace with Rob and Jack and Lane and Don delivering, that was a summer to remember. When it came for Lane and Don to knock off and return to teaching, they had sold 550 cords of wood. Since Don started late, they only gave him a half share. $5\frac{1}{2}$ shares of 550 cords made a full share worth 100 cords or \$23,500, Don's share worth \$11,750 and a couple's share \$47,000. And just because Lane and Don had to resume teaching, didn't mean that Jack and Rob had to quit. They managed to harvest another 180 cords before they quit for the season and that added \$21,150 to each couple's share (divided among the 4 of them). That made for \$68,150 for Rob and Sam and the same amount for Jack and Mary.

Jack had said the hell with raising hogs, they were a lot of work, and he just bought boxes of sub-primal cuts of beef and pork from the grocery store. He figured that it ended up costing him about the same and they didn't have to worry about cuts they didn't enjoy. It also occurred to him that he could probably buy chickens from the grocery store by the box and knock off raising the broilers. They'd still do the roasting hens, but at 24 hens a year, that was no big deal, one day's work for a couple of people.

Jack had gotten to know Don a little better once he'd started helping Lane with the deliveries. He decided for himself that Don was a keeper but knew to keep his mouth shut. Anyway, Lane added a freezer to her basement and filled it with sub-primal cuts that she'd managed to get the butcher to cut up for her. Rob and Sam also had a freezer and did the same. Remember, Rob and Lane are fraternal twins, so they probably thought alike. Don was there for Thanksgiving and for Christmas he offered up a diamond and Lane said yes. There hadn't been any large production when Rob and Sam got married and Lane said that there wasn't going to be any large production when Don and she got married.

They waited until school was out and had a quiet ceremony just like Rob and Sam's with family only. It turned out that Don's father, his name was Allen, had been forced into early retirement by a bad heart attack. Don's mother, June, worked for the City of Durango. And the sister, Janet, was a sophomore at the University of Colorado in Boulder. There was the usual assortment of wedding gifts and instead of a reception they just went out to dinner. Don had held on to the money he'd earned the previous year helping with the firewood for their honeymoon. They flew out to LA and took one of those cruises to Mexico.

"I must say Jack," Allen commented, "That this is quite the setup you have here. I believe in being prepared, but man, you've taken it to an extreme. Makes me think that I should do more myself."

"Of course, you'd always be welcome here, Allen," Jack said, "But I sure wouldn't want to be the one trying to get from Durango to Meeker. How far is it anyway?"

"265 miles, Jack," Allen replied. "We bypassed Grand Junction on 141, but it was close to a 6-hour drive."

"Forgive me if I'm prying, but how bad is your heart?" Jack asked.

"Had a triple bypass and can't work anymore," Allen said. "But, I get around pretty good. Do you mind if I ask what you have for firearms?"

"Let's start in my office and I show you everything we have, Allen," Jack said. "Now you'll have to understand that Mary, Rob, Sam, Lane and I are all Special Reserve Deputy Sheriff's so we're entitled to have some firearms that the average citizen can't have. Most of the guns belonged to Mary's father and mother and we inherited them."

Later, Allen said, "Jack that's quite the collection. I see suppressors but no automatic weapons."

"The problem with an automatic weapon, Allen, is that you mostly waste ammunition," Jack explained. "With those semi-auto's we can place every shot. You may have noticed that we have 2 of the Super Match M1A's from Springfield Armory. Rob and Lane also have one of those and one of the AR15 HBAR's with the M4-FA suppressors."

"What about that suppressed Ruger pistol?" Allen asked.

"That and the Garand rifle belonged to my father and I inherited them when he died," Jack remarked.

"How did all of you happen to become Special Reserve Deputy Sheriff's?" Allen asked.

"We sort of fell into that back a few years ago when some bad guys tried to break into our shelter," Jack said. "Rather than bust us for illegal weapons, the Sheriff made us Special Reserve Deputies answerable only to him. We got radios and became his eyes and ears out here east of Meeker. What County is Durango in?"

"La Plata," Allen replied.

"You shouldn't have any trouble getting a CCW," Jack said.

"I didn't," Allen chuckled. "But I don't think I'll ever be any kind of a Reserve Deputy with my heart condition."

"Well, Don will be as soon as they get back from that Honeymoon," Jack chuckled.

"Oh, really?" Allen said, "Well that solves one problem for me."

"Unless you get caught," Jack said.

"I won't say that it would never happen," Allen replied, "But they'd have to know to look, wouldn't they?"

"Have anything particular in mind?" Jack asked.

"I think maybe we ought to have a couple of those HBAR's and maybe one of the Super Match rifles, fully equipped, if you know what I mean," Allen explained.

"The kids have some Glock's in the .40 S&W," Jack said. "You might want to look into those."

"I have a 22C and June and Janet have the 23C's," Allen replied. "Got those after we met Lane."

"That's my girl," Jack laughed. "What do you have in the way of other preparations?"

"We have a propane powered Onan RS 15000 and a thousand gallon propane tank," Allen said. "Plus enough food for 3 months. I think maybe we'll increase that to 6 months, seeing what you have on hand. My propane tank is on a trailer and if TSHTF and we decide to come here, I'll load up the generator and hook onto the propane tank and bring them along. No sense in letting the stuff sitting for someone to steal."

"Let's just hope that it never comes to that," Jack said.

"Amen, brother," Allen added.

The Adams family headed back to Durango and Jack and Rob headed to the woods to resume where they'd left off. They didn't know if the summer of 2030 would match the

output of 2029 or not, but they didn't stand around talking about it. Lane and Don showed up about 8 days later and they spelled Mary. They would take over the splitting and delivery and Mary could rotate between hauling wood in from the forest and making deliveries. Robbie wasn't quite walking yet. Sam pitched in splitting wood when she wasn't busy tending the garden and canning. They had 500 cords cut and delivered when Lane and Don had to quit for return to Meeker. The price was still up so they split the \$117,500 3 ways, giving each couple \$39,166. Rob and Jack stayed at it, harvesting another 100 cords before they called it quits, giving each couple another \$11,750 or a total of \$50,917 (they split the odd money on the first 500 cords between Jack and Rob).

Now, if you stop and think about it, Lane and Don were both working earning whatever it was they paid schoolteachers. On top of those 2 paychecks, they had socked away almost 40 grand. It wasn't going to take them very long at all to pay off their home. When they returned to Meeker, the Sheriff finally got around to making Don a Special Reserve Deputy too. So, Don not only was teaching, he had to take classes. You shouldn't particularly feel sorry for Rob, either. One of those contracts he had had paid him \$75,000 over the winter.

Jack and Mary bought yet another CD, this one for \$35,000. Has anyone been keeping track of how many CD's they have? They had \$100,000 from the sale of the business and when Mary had said 'we've managed to save half', that half had amounted to \$9,375 plus \$14,000. Then, they fattened their retirement account by \$40,000 before they officially started buying CD's. They had purchased CD's for \$40k, \$30k, \$40k and \$35k. According to my calculator, they were sitting on \$308,375, plus interest. Not bad for a couple who were busting their butts selling firewood. Any money they spent otherwise came out of their checking account. Oh, the interest rate they had locked in was 6% and had been all along. The accumulated interest amounted to \$83,276.50, meaning Jack and Mary had a total of \$391,652.50 socked away. (I did a spreadsheet)

"So, when are we going to retire and enjoy our old age, honey," Mary asked.

"When we get \$1,000,000," Jack laughed.

"That's not going to take all that long," Mary suggested.

"Huh? What do you mean, Mary?" Jack asked.

"Well, we have \$391,652.50 tucked away in CD's, Jack," she explained. "Including the accumulated interest."

"Maybe we should retire now," Jack suggested.

"I like your idea better," she chuckled. "You had your hip and knee done the spring of 2026. The doctor said you'd get 10-15 years out of the knee, so why not work for 6 more years and call it quits whether we have the million dollars or not?"

“Well, ok, but I’d still like to work until I had a million dollars,” Jack said.

Over the past 5 years, they had averaged \$37,000 per year. At that rate, they would have over \$813 thousand dollars put away at the end of six more years. That is presuming that nobody got hurt, the production stayed about the same and the price of firewood stayed the same. It also presumed that the stuff wouldn’t hit the rotating blade. But, you know how it is about assumptions, don’t you? It didn’t really matter because they were living cheap and if they never added a dime to the principal, they could pull off about \$23.5k a year in interest. But even that was an assumption. It assumed that the interest rate remained at 6% and that their principal was safe. FDIC limits were still only \$200,000 in 2030 and they had all of their money in one financial institution.

The Loner – Chapter 28 – Here Comes Trouble

I won't say that it wasn't to be, but looking ahead like that usually attracted the attention of a guy name Murphy. Murphy just loved to sit around and wait for someone to develop expectations. But, Murphy played by the rules, his rules. And, whenever Murphy showed up it was legitimate to say, "Here comes trouble."

"Hello," Jack answered the phone.

"Jack this is Allen Adams," Allen's voice came over the receiver.

"Hi Allen, what's up?" Jack greeted him.

"Have you heard anything on the news about that group they call the Posse Comitatus?" Allen asked.

"No, if they were on the news I must have missed it," Jack replied. "I don't think I've heard anything about them since I was young. In March 1995, the Justice Department charged three members of Family Farm Preservation, an offshoot of the Posse Comitatus, with attempting to distribute \$65 million in counterfeit money orders. I was only about 17 at the time. The name popped up again in 2001, about a year after I graduated from college."

"Well, Jack, they're at it again," Allen announced.

"But it has been almost 30 years, Allen," Jack protested. "I did read an interesting piece on the web. It was an anti-deformation league website that discussed all kinds of supremacist groups. Anyway, what do you mean that they're at it again?"

"It was all over the news, Jack," Allen said, "Several churches were bombed. Some of them were churches attended by blacks in the south and others were synagogues."

"And how is Posse Comitatus associated with it?" Jack asked.

"Well, FOX News said that it was White Supremacists and mentioned Aryan Nations, Posse Comitatus and The National Alliance," Allen explained.

"It kind of reminds me of a line out of a movie, Allen," Jack replied. "In the movie *Big Jake*, John Wayne played Jacob McCandles. Every time he turned around someone was saying, *I thought you were dead*. I thought those organization were all gone after that trouble we had a few years back."

"I'll turn that one around on you Jack," Allen chuckled, "Do you remember what John Wayne's reply was to people who said that?"

"Yes, he said, *not hardly*," Jack said.

“That about describes the situation with these hate groups Jack, they aren’t dead, they’ve just been underground for a while.”

“Well, Allen, I told you about how I got to be a Special Reserve Deputy,” Jack responded. “All of that trouble started in 2012 and 2013 wasn’t a whole lot better. I seem to recall saying that I had had enough trouble to last me a lifetime. Now, 18 years later, we’re going to be back at it?”

“Unless I’ve read the situation all wrong or have misunderstood, yes,” Allen replied. “Look, Durango just laid June off and Janet is off to school. I was thinking maybe we ought to sell the house and move up to Meeker. It would put us with Don and no further from Janet.”

“There’s a piece of ground for sale on the other side of the road,” Jack said. “Why don’t you two drive up here and we’ll talk to a realtor about it. Besides, I’m sure that Lane and Don would love to have you. There’s just the 2 of them in that great big house.” (And Shakespeare, don’t forget.)

“Well, it was nice to visit with you Jack,” Allen said, “I’ll talk to June and we might drive up that way.”

“Talk to you soon, Allen,” Jack replied and hung up.

“Who was that, Jack,” Mary asked.

“It was Allen, honey,” Jack explained, “He said there was some kind of trouble with supremacist groups and that June had been laid off. They might move to Meeker.”

“Are they going to drive up here now?” Mary asked. “The roads aren’t all that good in January.”

“He just said he’d talk it over with June and that they might drive up,” Jack answered.

“This coming year on the 4th of July, we ought to get Allen and June and John and Nancy (Sam’s folks) out for a picnic,” Mary suggested.

“Good idea, Mary, maybe I can finally talk him into a family discount,” Jack laughed.

Did I tell you who Sam’s father was? He’s the guy who owned the gun store where Jack bought all of his guns. And her mother was the Choir Director at their church. Real nice people, but he worked 6 days a week, sort of like Jack, and then they were tied up on Sundays with church business, so Jack and Mary didn’t really see much of them except Sunday mornings at church.

So far as this white supremacy thing, Jack didn't really know what to make of it. There were a whole lot of God-fearing Christians in Colorado and a lot of fundamentalist churches. If they were bombing or burning down black Baptist churches, how long would it be before they were attacking churches or Synagogues in Colorado and other places around the country?

Around the first of February Allen and June showed up in Meeker. The next day Allen drove out to Jack and Mary's to have a look at the piece of land Jack mentioned. Allen was more of a city boy and he said that he thought they'd look around Meeker to see what they could find for a home. The price of homes in Meeker was a little lower than the price of homes in Durango, which was now a very high profile tourist attraction. Allen sort of figured he said, that they could clear enough on their home in Durango to full pay for a home in Meeker. Jack tried to bring up the white supremacist issue, but Allen seemed distracted, so he let it go.

A couple of days later, Allen was back. He said that they'd found a nice house and had made an offer on it subject to the sale of their home. It was the height for the skiing season and there was always people looking for a home in Durango at this time of the year, or so he said. They took off to get back to Durango, probably to list their home. Three weeks later he called back and said that not only had their home sold, but also it had sold well. They were clearing enough to pay off the old house, pay for the new house, pay the realtor's commission and pay for their moving expenses. Must be nice, was the only thought that came to Jack's mind. Allen hadn't brought up the subject of the white supremacists again.

Moreover, Jack had gone out on the net and if there were any stories about problems with white supremacists, he couldn't find them. He saw where Churches and Synagogues had been bombed, but they didn't say anything about white racists. Then, he remembered that Jack had said FOX News. FOX News had developed a reputation in recent years for some extreme reporting. Maybe because that Rivera guy was the Director of the news department and he had a lawsuit going trying to overturn the change to the 1st Amendment. What did you expect when you made a lawyer the Director of the news department? Knowing that, Jack imagined that FOX had narrowly skirted around the issue of white supremacists around the same time they reported the church bombings. A lawyer like Geraldo pushed things right up to the edge, but never quite over. Either Allen wasn't paying attention, or he was an alarmist, probably the former.

You all know that the Supreme Court sometimes reverses itself, right? Well not with the same set of Justices sitting on the bench they don't. Geraldo was wasting his time and energy trying to get the same court to reverse itself. Maybe he figured that by the time his case made it all the way back up to the court one or more of the Justices would have died or retired changing the makeup of the court and consequently forcing a new decision. Yeah right, he probably just did it for the publicity.

You have to ask yourself why would Allen and June want to move to Meeker from a place like Durango. Meeker had its tourist traffic, too, but it wasn't nearly as extensive

as Durango. Allen couldn't work so it made no difference where he lived, but Jack sort of wondered if it wouldn't have been easier for June to find a new job in the community they'd lived in all of their lives. On the other hand, Allen had admitted right up front that he could have read the situation wrong. Maybe he was just keeping his head down, whatever the reason.

Do you have any heroes? A guy like Jack comes as close to a hero as I can imagine. He'd met and married a woman and it turned out that they couldn't have kids, so they adopted twins. He'd taken good advice when it had been given and gotten the family into church. He provided for his family in all of their physical and spiritual needs. Later, when it came time to think about college for the children, he'd busted his back earning money and shared it equally with them and his wife. He hadn't told the kids what they had to do and had been supportive of their decisions, even when sometimes he might have thought that one of the kids made a bad choice (remember Andy). When the bad guys showed up, he'd protected his family and when people got lost he gone to help look for them. And, he didn't go around bragging about all of his accomplishments.

Then, when his body failed him, he'd taken some more good advice and endured pain and suffering and 4 months of physical therapy, just so he could get out in the woods and break his back some more. Without denying the kids or Mary's part in the story of the Summers family, I'll have to tell you that Jack Summers, or Cowboy as he was known at one time, was and is a hero in my book. Everyone who works hard and provides for his or her family is a hero. Maybe they aren't perfect and make mistakes, but so what?

By mid-April of 2031 Jack and Rob were able to get back into the forest. They had a new area to work this year and didn't really know what to expect when it came to the animal population. They started off cutting the logs to the 16" lengths and leaving them lay where they fell. When it looked like they had 2 full loads, they put the logs into the pickups and trailers and hauled them back to the cabin where they unloaded them. Any day where they could get full loads for both trucks and trailers was a good day. Mary was right there the day after they unloaded that first load of wood splitting and Sam was loading up the two trucks and trailers. Then when they had the vehicles loaded, they climbed in the pickups and drive off towards Meeker where they had to handle those same 3 cords of wood one more time and unload them. It was hard enough work for a man, let alone a woman.

I can tell you one thing, it sure didn't take Sam long to get rid of the fat from her pregnancy. Then, when the ground was thawed and dry enough to till, Sam would fire up the rototiller, till the soil, rake it and plant the seeds that turned into the food they ate. She looked upon the gardening as a break, almost a rest period. And on top of that, Robbie was now a toddler requiring constant attention. I can't really imagine what it must have been like, hard, that much is certain. And because Jack had decided that they weren't going to raise any more broilers, come July Lane and Sam would be stuck with killing and butchering those hens.

Don turned out to be a very willing worker, and the hard work quickly got rid of his extra body fat and turned that fat in muscle. He didn't know it then, but that was pretty much a permanent weight loss that summer and the summer before. During 2031, he had started out in a lot better condition than he had when he'd returned from the honeymoon. Lane had dragged him to John's gun store and outfitted him with a Redhawk, speed loaders, holster and speed loader case during the school year and when the weather permitted she'd taken him out shooting until he was deadly with the .44 magnum. She followed that up with the Super Match rifle until he was shooting 1 MOA groups out to 600-yards. After that came sessions with the AR until he was shooting it respectably. Don didn't need any lessons with a shotgun or the model 70 Winchester, just a little practice. And, in turn, he taught Lane to shoot the bow and arrows.

Just between you and me, it's usually one hell of a lot easier to teach someone to shoot new guns, given that they already know how to shoot, than it is to teach someone to shoot a bow and arrows. I did the archery thing in my youth and it is easier to watch than to do. But, what do they say? Ah, but practice makes perfect or, in this case, adequate. They weren't going to use bows and arrows for self-defense anyway. Don't bring a bow and arrow to a gunfight either. In the unlikely event that anyone at the cabin had to fire a weapon in defense God help the person or animal being fired upon. This year since Robbie was mobile and able to get into things, they kept Champ at the cabin and Ranger went into the forest with the men.

Except for Sunday mornings, Jack and Rob only stopped for the 4th of July and Labor Day. It had been warmer this past winter but they had a lot of orders, probably because people were afraid that it would turn colder again. On a weekly basis they were cutting 39 cords of wood. Jack had picked up a spare 4th chainsaw and about halfway through the day they switched instead of stopping to sharpen the saws. Ranger kept a sharp lookout and this year they didn't see a single bear or anymore of those Eco-terrorists. Because of the prominence of the individuals involved, the media had tried to turn it into a circus. The attorneys representing the defendants had seen the handwriting on the wall and they'd ended up pleading guilty to assaulting a peace officer, Jack, and the prosecutor had dropped the charge against them for assaulting the second peace officer, Rob. Most unusual, one would have thought that the defendants would have tried to get media attention. They probably would have had not the prosecutor agreed to less than the maximum sentence.

Jack and Rob had actually started on April 14th, a Monday. They put in 16 full days in April, 28 full days in May, 26½ days in June, 28 full days in July, 28½ full days in August and no days in September since September 1, 2031 was Labor Day. That was a total of 127 full days of work at 6 cords per day come rain or shine. It was a record they would probably never achieve again, 762 cords of wood. And it had all been hauled to the cabin and split. Lane and Don had knocked off one week earlier and hadn't started until June, but no one was holding that against them. 42 of those cords of wood went for personal consumption and 720 were sold and delivered at a net price of \$235 per cord. The proceeds, \$169,200, were divided 3 ways with each couple getting \$56,400. Jack and Mary added \$45,000 to their savings because their checkbook was rather fat.

Counting accrued interest, they ended the year with accumulated savings of \$460,151 and change.

“Jack I don’t expect we’ll ever have another year like this,” Mary observed. “But we could get to the million dollars you want in the bank so we can retire.”

“I don’t think so,” Jack contradicted. “I want to trade in the oldest pickup and buy a new one.”

“What’s that going to cost us?” Mary asked.

“I figure with trade in on the order of \$50 grand,” Jack announced.

“And without the trade in?” she asked.

“About \$51,000.”

“Fine we’ll keep the old pickup and just buy a new one for personal use only,” she said.

“Maybe we’ll need to paint lines on the ground for a parking lot,” Jack kidded.

“Phooey, we’ll just keep the new pickup in the garage,” she said.

“But we don’t have a garage,” Jack protested.

“We will by the time we pick up the pickup, dear,” she announced.

“Oh,” Jack grunted in acceptance.

The lumberyard had a building crew that wasn’t busy and they graded a spot and poured a slab. 2 days later they were back and the garage went up in a day. It took longer to roof the building than erect it. They hung the rollup door, and put in a light and a couple of outlets and it was ready. Jack and Mary got themselves the latest and greatest GMC club cab 4-WD long bed pickup the dealer had. It had a diesel engine, automatic transfer case and automatic transmission, rear dualies and oversized alternator and battery and towing package. Jack told the dealer to pull the alternator, add 2 generators, second battery, and auxiliary fuel tank. Needed a bed liner and a large toolbox, bolted in place, too. Then, they went by the radio shop and bought a 2-meter rig, Sheriff’s band radio, a CB and a dash mount GPS. Told that salesman the pickup was at the GMC dealer’s and they wanted the stuff installed right away.

The Loner – Chapter 29 – Waiting for the Shoe to Drop

All of those extras on the pickup caused the price to slide up but they had the money in the checking account from this year and the previous years and they paid cash for everything. The pickup had a 2-tone green and white paint job and was the prettiest thing Jack had ever seen. Jack had picked up an assortment of spares for the pickup and vacuum sealed the 'rubber' products and built a vehicle emergency case. But he only assembled a 72-hour BOB since more than likely they wouldn't be going anywhere if TSHTF. Then, they went back to town and got those sub-primal cuts of beef and pork plus a case of chickens and restocked the freezers after cutting up everything and vacuum packing it.

"Lane is pregnant," Mary announced.

"It's about time," Jack laughed. "I was wondering if I was going to have to get them an instruction book."

"Sam is pregnant, too," Mary continued.

"There goes our work crew," Jack observed.

"The price of firewood is going down \$30 a cord," she went on.

"Guess it doesn't make much difference, we won't be harvesting much this coming year," Jack tried to keep his smile.

"And I'm too pooped to pop," Mary finished.

"I know what you mean honey, but we've had our best year ever," Jack acknowledged. "We could end everything on a high note and just stop. You said last year that we could live on the interest alone."

"We're still going to need to harvest firewood to heat with, but I think it wouldn't hurt to cut the production to about 400 cords of wood," she suggested. "I have more muscles than Arnold Schwarzenegger."

"I think that this coming year you can tend the garden and we'll get Don to do the splitting," he replied. "Rob and I'll knock off in late July and help with the splitting and deliveries. We'll try to get a wrap on everything by the time Lane and Don have to go back to town."

"Do you ever wonder if we did the right thing?" Mary asked.

"What do you mean, Mary?" Jack asked.

"I don't know what I mean, I guess that I'm just tired," she replied.

“I suppose that we shouldn’t have bought the pickup,” Jack said. “But after how hard we worked this summer, I just felt that we’d earned the right to have something new for a change.”

You’ve been there, right? Done with second hand and hand-me-downs and busted your back and had very little to show for it? And, the harder you work, the further behind you become? And then, just when you’re too tired to think you let your wants and desires overcome your good sense and you do something you always wanted to do and then wonder if you really should have done it. Jack had assumed that Mary was talking about the new truck. What if she had just been waxing and waning philosophic? What if she was just referring to life in general and all of the decisions that they’d made since they’d gotten married?

I didn’t make a big deal about their wedding when I started to tell their story. They were married in 2005, as I recall. This was 2031 and they had been married 26 years. They’d been so busy, what with one thing and another that they’d completely overlooked their 25th Anniversary. Or, I did, but it amounts to the same thing. No wait, I’m one of those writer/author dudes and I put my pants on two legs at a time and don’t even get my shoes wet when I walk on water, right? Then, stop looking for typos! We author dudes never have .308 caliber AR15’s (they’re called AR-10’s), or .50 caliber MP-5’s. Well... And, Jack and Mary are living on what, a couple of measly acres? It’s ok; they weren’t growing soybeans, just stacking firewood. A cord of firewood has a footprint of 32 square feet. An acre contains 43,560 square feet and you could pile 1,361 cords of firewood on an acre if you wanted to haul it after you split it.

Gasoline. Everything was diesel, right? Wrong, the hydraulic wood splitters and chain-saws had gasoline engines. So, way back when Jack put in the 5,000-gallon diesel tank, he’d moved Janice’s 300-gallon diesel tank back to his cabin and used it to store gasoline. Like I said earlier in the story, waste not, want not. And, how many times can the blades on a wind turbine make their little revolutions before they wear out the bearings and the turbine has to be serviced? Every once in a while, that’s another fact. And is our boy Jack still climbing up and cleaning the blades on that wind turbine? Nope, Rob is, Jack’s too old for that stuff.

They’d gotten Ranger in 2017 or 2018, 2017, if I recall. He passed on during the winter of 2031-2032 having cheated death out of an extra year or two. Rob got in touch with those people who supplied level 3 Executive/Family protection dogs and got a replacement named Bear. Shakespeare was born in March of 2019 and was getting a bit long in the tooth too. Come March, he’d be 13 years old. So, when Ranger died and Rob went looking for a guard dog, Lane told him to find them a companion for Shakespeare, preferably a German Shepherd that looked like Kathy Ireland. What they got instead was a dog named Kaiser that looked a whole lot like a German Shepherd. Point of reference, Champ was 2 years old in 2024 making him 10 years old in 2032. Jack and Mary’s new dog was named Brutus and he was Champ’s companion.

"I think that we'll just wait until the ground is ready and put in the garden," Jack suggested sometime in early April. "Rob is tied up on a computer project and Sam is waddling, so we'll have to wait until Don and Lane are out of school to start cutting wood."

"The doctor told Lane that she's going to have twins," Mary announced.

"I thought twins skipped a generation," Jack said.

"May be, but June was a twin, so I guess it depends upon which side of the family you look at," Mary replied. (Genetics 101)

Rob finished his project and showed up about the same time as Don did. Jack explained that they probably wouldn't do nearly as much firewood this year because $\frac{1}{3}$ of the staff was off for the season. Mary, he said, would do the gardening and Don could do the splitting. They could just stack everything up and make deliveries in August. Sam was due in June and Lane in mid-July. Rob suggested a change in plans. Don could go to the woods with him and Jack could stay back at the cabin and split and stack the wood. They'd haul whatever they cut each day in when they returned home in the evening. One job was as good as another as far as Jack was concerned so that's how they did it.

Mary had only taken orders for 350 cords of wood, telling everyone that called that with two daughters expecting, they had to cut back for 2032. She wasn't sure how much time they'd lose because of Don's inexperience with a chainsaw and time off to hold hands while babies were born. She hadn't counted on the fact that Don was very experienced with a chainsaw and simply hadn't mentioned it. Where Jack and Rob were lucky to get 6 cords of wood cut in a full day, Don and Rob were getting closer to 7. Jack was splitting wood as fast as he could move and when Mary had a little free time, she was using the second splitter to help him keep up. On the 21st of June, Sam gave birth to a 6 pound 11 ounce daughter. They named her Lane Mary. Sam had told Rob that there wasn't anything he could do at the hospital except worry so he should wait until the end of the workday to come to the hospital. Thus, it fell to Mary to take Sam in when the labor was advanced enough to head to town. Jack just kept splitting wood because he was getting a shade behind of the boys.

On the 14th of July when Lane went into labor, Don came in from the woods and took her to the hospital, leaving Rob alone in the forest with Bear to stand guard. Jack didn't think that was a particularly good idea and he stopped splitting wood, strapped on his Redhawk and drove out to join Rob. Rob looked up long enough to wave when Jack showed up and finished cutting off the log.

"How's Lane doing?" he asked Jack.

"She'll probably be in labor for quite a while with this being her first baby," Jack replied. "Seen any bears?"

“Haven’t seen a thing, Dad,” Rob answered. “Don showed me a way to make the chain-saw cut just a hair faster, watch this.”

After Rob demonstrated the new approach, Jack gave it a try. By the time they were ready to quit for the day and load up, they had managed to cut 6 cords. When you stop and think that they’d lost maybe an hour or an hour and a half due to Don’s leaving, their production was very good. They loaded up the timber and drove back to the cabin and unloaded the trucks and trailers.

“It looks like we’re about 35 cords ahead of you,” Rob said.

“I never did much splitting, Rob and I can only manage about 5 cords a day,” Jack replied. “Your Mom helps when she’s not busy with the garden but it takes time to stack the wood, too.”

“We’ll be working right up to September 5th this year,” Rob said, “School doesn’t start until the day after Labor Day on September 7th.”

“I lost some time plucking those dang hens, too,” Jack explained.

“Why don’t you just give up raising hens?” Rob asked.

“You ever price a baking hen in the store?” Jack asked. “And, we’d have to buy eggs on top of it.”

“I never realized you were so cheap,” Rob kidded.

“Ain’t cheap, boy, just being frugal,” Jack laughed. “Anyway, I know how fresh my eggs are, you never know with those things at the store. All they have is expiration dates. Say, how many cords a day are Don and you cutting?”

“About 7,” Rob said. “That’s why we have to come back for a second load about twice a week.”

“Your Mom only sold 350 cords of wood this year and it only went for \$220 a cord,” Jack noted.

“If it turns cold, maybe people will need more and you can charge them \$250,” Rob suggested.

“If not, we’ll have a good jump on next year,” Jack replied.

On July 15th Lane had a baby girl and a baby boy and they name her Samantha June and him Robert Allen. They both came in around 6 pounds, give or take. Don was back at work the day after the babies were born. Rob and he worked to make up for lost time but they never got over 7 cords a day. On Sunday, September 5th, when they hauled in

the last of the wood, they had harvested 571 cords. Jack had the 350 cords split and stacked and Mary and Rob made the deliveries throughout the month of September, some days delivering 12 cords. The families took 31 cords for themselves leaving a pile of 190 cords of extra firewood. They only realized \$71,750 for the firewood, giving each family \$23,917. (350x\$205÷3)

"I thought that maybe you'd name your son after me," Jack said to Lane.

"Oh Daddy, what kind of a name is Cowboy?" she replied.

"There was a singer once named Cowboy Copas," Jack said. "He was killed in that plane crash with Patsy Cline."

"Patsy who?" Sam asked.

"Never mind Lane, that happened 15 years before I was born," Jack chuckled. [Lloyd "Cowboy" Copas, July 15, 1913 - March 5, 1963]

"Anyway," Jack said, "I brought your check for this year's share of the firewood sales."

"Thanks Daddy, you must have done pretty good for one share to be almost \$24 thousand."

"That's 2 shares, Lane," Jack said, "It's a family business so we just divided it 3 ways. Haven't seen much of Allen or June."

"June got a job working for the city and Allen doesn't get out much," Lane explained.

"When you see them, tell them I said Hi," Jack responded. "Well I've got to get going; I just stopped by to drop off your check. I'm taking your mother out for a fancy dinner tonight."

"Oh, where are you going?" Lane asked.

"The Main Street Café, of course," Jack chuckled. "They've got meatloaf on the menu."

Mary had worked hard in the garden and kitchen that year and Jack figured that she deserved a night out on the town. I'm sure that Mary agreed with Jack, but I'm not so sure she was thinking about the meatloaf Blue Plate Special. Mary should have been grateful; I took my wife to Burger King for our wedding dinner. To his way of thinking, there really wasn't a good steakhouse in Meeker and he didn't think she'd appreciate pizza or a hamburger joint.

Over the course of the winter of 2032-2033, they didn't get a call for even a stick of firewood. Jack told Mary that come this next year, she should take every order she could get. But, the Old Farmer's Almanac and the NWS said that next winter would be warmer

than this year and this year both the snowfall and temperatures were back to normal. Realizing that he was coming up on 55 and that they didn't really have to work anymore, Jack decreed that they'd harvest all of the timber they could during the coming year and retire and live off their interest income and his little disability check. Lord knows that except for repairing or replacing what they already had, the only thing they needed was enough income to live on.

Remember the \$460,151 I said they had? They took the \$45 grand back out of savings to buy the new pickup. And they had depleted their checking account some but had added back in almost 24,000 for 2032. So, at the end of 2032, their savings, including interest was only \$440,061, but, they had a fairly respectable checking account balance and those 190 cords of lumber piled up outside. With three new grandchildren and a toddler who wanted their attention, Jack and Mary found themselves at Rob's or Lane's quite a bit. On one of those visits, Jack ran into Allen.

The Loner – Chapter 30 – Pride Goeth Before Destruction

And a haughty spirit before a fall.

“Hi Allen, I haven’t seen you but a few times since you moved to Meeker,” Jack said. “I understand that June is working for the City of Meeker now.”

“Hi Jack, yes she is,” Allen said, “Sorry about not visiting more, but I don’t get out much.”

“Under the weather?” Jack asked trying to make conversation.

“I was so darned certain that the White Supremacist were at it again, I’ve been working on getting all of our preparations made,” Allen explained.

“What have you gotten done so far, if I may ask?” Jack replied.

“Well, we bought that old house and it had an extra deep basement, so I got in there and built a shelter,” Allen said. “That’s turned into a nightmare. I figured with the 10’ ceiling I could put in a frame below the windows and pour concrete, forming a shelter. But I’ve had nothing but problems.”

“You know that I’d be more than happy to help Allen, what kind of problems?” Jack offered.

“Water doesn’t flow uphill and I haven’t figured out how to get plumbing in the basement for one thing,” Allen observed.

“So, get yourself a sewage pump,” Jack said. “What other problems are you having?”

“Water for everything, for a second thing,” Allen said.

“You can get collapsible water tanks and put it in the basement and use an RV pump to pressurize the system,” Jack suggested. “You can hook it to city water and put in a cut-off valve. That’s easy enough.”

“If I leave that home standby system outside, it won’t really be safe or reliable as a source of electricity,” Allen went on.

“I have my generator in the shelter and pipes for air intake and exhaust, you can do the same,” Jack replied.

“I’m not into this survival thing like you are Jack,” Allen said, “You have all of the answers on the tip of your tongue and I have no idea where to start.”

“You buy the guns you were talking about?” Jack asked.

“You bet and I have a gun safe, too,” Allen said.

“If you go to endoftimes dot com Allen, you can get a lot of information,” Jack advised. “Now, I would have thought that you would have been on the phone to me asking for advice. I didn’t start out knowing all of this stuff, you know, and we’ve had years to build up our preparations. You said something about getting more food, how did that work out?”

“Never got around to it, where can I get food for long-term storage?” Allen asked.

“A dozen places or more, but we use Walton Feed for our long-term stuff. It’s packed in nitrogen,” Jack explained. “Say, is money a problem?”

“Money? No, not at all, but I just don’t know what I’m doing, Jack,” Allen admitted.

“Well hell partner, we’re family, and what is family for? That’s a couple of nice grandkids we have isn’t it?”

“I guess that I was just too embarrassed to ask, Jack,” Allen confessed. “You remember when you showed me your setup I talked a pretty good game, right?”

“Yep, you seemed to know your stuff,” Jack agreed.

“All came out of books, Jack,” Allen said. “But if you’ll give me a hand, I’ll get that shelter finished up.”

“Got you covered partner, just don’t wait so long to call,” Jack said extending his hand.

Jack realized that he had a lot of free time on his hands until it came time for the final harvest and before he left, he offered to drive into Meeker and give Allen a hand, weather permitting. Obviously, Allen didn’t have that haughty spirit and he readily agreed. You could even see the gratitude written all over his face if you looked hard enough. A few days later, Jack called Allen and went over to their address. Allen had done a pretty good job for someone who didn’t know what he was doing. The first thing they did was install a bathroom with a sink, stool and shower plus a sewage pump hooked up to the city sewer.

Next, they laid $\frac{3}{4}$ ” plywood over the sturdy frame that Allen had built and held off ordering concrete until a warm day. In the meantime, with Rob’s help, they manhandled the home standby system to the basement and connected up intake and exhaust pipes with blast valves and shutoff valves. They would have to wait for spring to run the permanent gas line, but for the interim, ran a flexible line and wired the automatic transfer switch into the basement fuse panel. It was cheaper to buy shelving than to build it and Allen could assemble it without any help, so they loaded him up with shelving and told him to call when it was all done.

Jack suggested that Allen also install a 3 bar blast door and an air filtration system that he could get from Utah Shelter Systems and that he'd help install them. Allen had been on the phone to Walton Feed and had ordered 2 1-year deluxe food supplies, a grain grinder and a meat grinder. He'd also ordered 2 collapsible 2,400-gallon water tanks and an RV pump. They set up the tanks in the area next to where the other equipment was and plumbed everything. Some days Allen worked so hard that Jack was afraid he was going to have a heart attack.

When the air filtration system and blast door arrived, Jack suggested that Allen have it professionally installed and the concrete block filled with rebar and concrete. In Colorado, it's easy to find a masonry contractor looking for a side job during the winter. When the contractor saw what Allen had going, he told them he could pour the roof for the shelter on the first warm day, pumping the concrete in through the basement windows. Allen told him to go for it. Jack checked over the contents of Allen's gun safe and told Allen that he really ought to get Don to get him those suppressors. Allen told Jack that he'd asked but Don wasn't about to put his butt on the line.

What the hell, Jack went had had a talk with the Sheriff and explained the situation. The Sheriff told Jack to have Allen come in and they'd run a background check on him. If it came up clean, he'd see his way clear to making Allen a Special Reserve Deputy. The Sheriff noted that they'd already run a background check on June and, if she wanted, she could be deputized, too. Jack said that was fine, but right now he could get the Surefire suppressor and M4-FA on sale. The Sheriff called June on the phone and when she showed up, deputized her on the spot. That problem was solved.

Next, Jack tackled the communications problem. Allen had a Technicians license so they went to the store and picked up a 40 channel SSB CB, 2 40-channel CB handi talkies, a Sheriff's band radio, 2 Sheriff's band handi talkies, a used Icom HF transceiver and a tri-band UHF radio plus a monopole (ordered) and some RG-213U cable. Jack suggested that Allen study and upgrade his license to Extra class. About this time Allen had to call Uncle. He had just enough money left to pay for that concrete and June and he had to take the Sheriff's classes.

"Are you satisfied with what you've accomplished?" Jack asked.

"It's more like what we accomplished and yes, I'm very happy," Allen said.

"The way I see it, you should move that freezer down here, fill in your medical supplies and buy some ammunition," Jack said. "I'd be upgrading that diesel pickup, if I were you, too."

"Where can I get furniture for the shelter?" Allen asked, "I don't have much cash left."

"You can try Goodwill, Allen," Jack suggested, "It's strictly function over form."

"I just want to thank you from the bottom of my heart, Jack," Allen said. "If I hadn't been embarrassed we could have had this basement converted a long time ago."

Allen bought a recalibrated Survey Meter from KI4U when they had the overhead in and he still had money to spend. By this time, the ground was ready to till and Sam was already in the garden. Rob didn't have any jobs to complete, so he and Jack headed for the woods. Jack had picked up the knack of cutting wood faster and Rob and he were soon turning out 7 cords a day of logs ready to be split. Jack told Rob that if they could lie in another 720 cords of wood this year, he was planning on selling off half of his equipment including 2 of the pickups, 2 trailers, 2 chainsaws and 1 hydraulic splitter. Mary had told him that they weren't getting many orders this year and 350 cords would more than cover what she had sold.

As soon as Lane and Don showed up Jack came in from the woods and got Don helping Rob. Mary got to do the babysitting and Lane started filling the orders. Jack lit into the splitting and Lane either took what he had split or pulled 3 cords a time from their prior year's surplus. Then when the 4th of July rolled around, they took time off to butcher the hens and celebrate Independence Day. Mary sometimes helped Jack split wood when the kids were all down for a nap, but it didn't amount to more than a couple of hours a day. This year the last day of work was September 4th, the day before Labor Day. They sold 300 cords of wood at \$205 net and each family's share was \$20,500. They put the money in their checking account, bringing it up to a right smart balance.

There was still one hell of a pile of wood to split and stack and Jack decided that he'd wait until it was all done before he sold off his equipment. Sam and Mary ran the splitters and Jack and Rob hauled and stacked. Darn, forgot to tell you, they harvested 730 cords of wood and took 21 for their own use. $(190+720)-(300+21) = 589$ cords in reserve. A coat of paint and a little grease plus an engine tune-up restored the splitters to near new condition. They had the chainsaws they were keeping rebuilt and put new chains on the ones they were selling. Used tires and a coat of paint made the trailers look new. Jack put an ad in the paper offering a complete package deal for \$15,000.

"Sorry I haven't seen much of you this summer, Allen, but I've been busier than a one-armed paper hanger" Jack said. "Got the shelter all done?"

"We ended up needing to replace the furnace with a wood fired boiler and replace the registers with radiators," Allen replied. "But yeah, we're all done."

"How much firewood do you have on hand?" Jack asked.

"Maybe 10 cords," Allen said.

"You need to keep 25 on hand," Jack said. "I can sell it to you for \$15 a cord."

"That's pretty cheap," Allen said.

“Well, that just covers our cost of production, Allen but that’s enough.”

“Here, let me write you a check for \$225,” Allen said. “I’ll ask Don to help me move it on Saturday.”

“We’ll load up my two pickups and use them,” Jack suggested. “It will take about 5 loads, or a little over a day. If we can do 4 loads on Saturday and the 5th on Sunday after church, you’ll be set for the winter.”

“I thought you had 4 pickups and trailer,” Allen said.

“Selling off half of my equipment for \$15,000,” Jack replied.

“Are you sure those 15 cords of wood won’t run you short?” Allen asked.

“It will cut our inventory some,” Jack agreed, “We’ll only have 574 cords left after we fill your order.”

“Are you retiring?” Allen asked.

“More like slowing down, partner,” Jack said. “We’ll still harvest some wood, but only about 3 cords a day from now on and we’re taking off weekends.”

“Lane said that you only raise roasting hens,” Allen announced.

“It’s just as cheap to buy sub-primal cuts and cut and package your own meat,” Jack explained. “We only have to hens to get eggs. They’re full size in 15 months and their egg production drops off so we add 24 new chickens every spring and butcher the hens around the 4th of July.”

“The doc asked me if I wanted prescription for IV fluids,” Allen mentioned.

“It’s not all that hard to learn to do establish an IV Allen and the doc will train you and write prescriptions for what you need,” Jack said. “I’ve never had to use the stuff even though I’ve kept it on hand for years. If you have a laptop, I’ll give you a copy of the spreadsheet I use to keep track of our inventory. I keep track of the expiration dates and rotate and or replace things as needed.”

“What would we need IV’s for?” Allen asked.

“Could mean the difference between life and death if TSHTF and someone got shot,” Jack explained.

“Ok I’ll add the stuff, Jack,” Allen said. “Anything else?”

“You can look at the inventory and see what we keep on hand,” Jack suggested.

“That sounds easy enough,” Allen said. “Ok, we’ll do that. What exactly does a Special Reserve Deputy Sheriff do, anyway?”

“You stay qualified with your weapon and beyond that you do exactly what the Sheriff tells you to do,” Jack chuckled. “It’s more of a thing so you can have those suppressors and help the Sheriff out in an emergency. I wouldn’t be going around playing cop if I were you; the dang laws are so complicated anymore I don’t know how they keep up with them.”

“How do I get the suppressors?” Allen asked.

“Probably the easiest way is to get the Sheriff’s Department to order them for you and you pay for them,” Jack replied. “Or, talk to Sam’s Dad, John, he’s a class III dealer. For the Super Match, I recommend that you only use Black Hills ammo. You can get it in 175gr BTHP match. I use Black Hills reloaded stuff for my AR’s in the 55-grain FMJ.”

The Loner – Chapter 31 – Criminal Elements

For years, Jack had been preparing for trouble. There had been a little, dang little, and his preparations, even some of those last minute preparations, had always saved their bacon. At times, he was very tempted to just back off, staying prepared was a lot of work and some of the stuff you had to replace most often, expensive. They'd lived like poor people for a very long time and had money put away to show for it. About the only luxury he'd ever allowed himself was that new pickup. Almost everything else that others might call a luxury could be justified in a survival sense. Harvesting firewood was a lot of hard work; he knew that when he got into it. But it was labor intensive and didn't require much equipment and no livestock.

Not unless you considered the dogs to be livestock, it didn't. But those dogs were just members of the family as far as he was concerned. Allen had turned out to be ok, but he sure had been wondering for a while. You didn't see many houses with basements 10' deep but Allen had taken advantage of that and had himself a nice shelter; very nice. Lane and Don could go there if they couldn't get to the cabin. And, he'd started out slow on the grandpa thing but that had all changed in a hurry.

Just before the ground froze hard, Shakespeare had passed on. No doubt Champ wouldn't be far behind him, another year or so. They were getting a regular pet cemetery under that tree. And here it was, March of 2034 and he was 56 years old. Where did the time go? 2033 had passed in the blink of an eye and helping Allen with his preparations had eaten up those idle hours when he would have noticed time passing more slowly. The older you got, the faster time passed and when you were busy, it just went faster. It wasn't until April that a young buck came along and bought that equipment. Kid paid cash and Jack stuck it in the checking account. At Mary's suggestion, they rolled their regular checking account into a high interest checking account. The longer they could hold off draining the interest off their investments, the bigger their principal became. A half million would just have to do, but was nice to have a goal.

Old habits die hard and when the ground was ready, they rototilled the garden. Then Sam showed up and helped Mary plant. Rob was just finishing up another of those computer projects and he didn't show up until Lane and Don did. Even with half the equipment, they were producing about 5 cords per day of firewood. But eliminating working Saturdays and half days Sundays only gave them 5x13 or 65 workdays. Still, they harvested another 325 cords total. But with the warmer weather demand had fallen again and had forced the price down another \$20. They sold 200 cords at \$200 (\$185, net) and divided up \$37,000, \$12,333 per family.

On the 4th of July, they had had a big blowout and Allen and June had showed up as well as John and Nancy. The 4th was a Tuesday in 2034, but Don and Rob were about a day's production ahead and it didn't affect the final production. Jack had bought a 12-pack of Coors in case anyone wanted a drink and he'd ended up with 3-4 beers that would probably just take up space in the refrigerator left over. Didn't drink, didn't smoke and only occasionally cussed described the entire crowd.

"Haven't seen you in the store in a long time, Jack," John said.

"Got all the guns I need and then some, John," Jack replied. "Plus, I mostly buy my ammo directly from Black Hills factory. I sent Allen over; did you take care of him?"

"Got him a FA762S and a M4-FA," John said, "But you must have told him about Black Hills because he didn't buy any ammo."

"Killed any bears lately?" John asked.

"Not in a long time, John," Jack chuckled. "You heard about that bear that attacked the eco-terrorists, right? Well, we seem to have some sort of truce with those bears, they leave us alone and we don't shoot them."

"I understand that you're cutting back on production," John said.

"Yeah, we're taking weekends off and I sold half of my equipment to some kid who thinks he can get rich selling firewood," Jack replied.

"You didn't do so badly," John observed.

"True, it put the kids through college and left them with money to get started," Jack explained. "Mary and I always lived cheap and Janice helped out some before she died. Made some money when I sold off the Outfitting business and socked it away. And then, when the weather was cold and the firewood sales were good, we saved some more. Don't really have to work hard anymore; got ourselves a nice little nest egg."

"You might want to consider getting Mary and yourself a couple of those Glock's," John suggested. "There's a criminal element around the country these days. It looks like the country lost the war on drugs and everyone and his brother is into making or dealing or something."

"I might consider buying some if you'd give a halfway decent price," Jack said.

"I'll give you a 30% discount," John said, "I still have to cover the overhead. And, I can get you a better price on that Black Hills ammo than you can get for yourself."

"Cheap is good," Jack chuckled. "Ok John, Get a 21SF for Mary and me, 4 extra 13-round magazines apiece and the leather and I'll be in on Saturday to pick the stuff up. I had hoped that we were done with carrying firearms all of the time."

"You probably want to get some Speer Gold Dot for those weapons," John said. "Either 200gr or 230gr."

"Which do you recommend?" Jack asked.

"I use 200gr," John said, "It's personal preference."

"Then give me 1,000 rounds of the 200gr Gold Dot, John," Jack said. "We'll burn up a fair amount getting used to the new guns. Druggies, you say?"

"Well yeah, they're going everywhere trying to find places to manufacture speed and not get caught," John reported. "The Sheriff got into the White River Forest just last week and broke up an operation. You don't want Gold Dot for practice. I'll get you a case of 200gr Lawman for that."

"Sure, ok. Of course when the boys are out in the woods, they're armed with those Redhawks," Jack said, "But we've sort of gotten out of the habit of being armed around the cabin. I suppose we could carry the Redhawks, but they're so darn heavy."

"Out of all of this extended family, Mary and you are the only two without those Glock's," John said. "I'll have them ready for you on Saturday. Want compact backup pieces?"

"Recommendation?"

"Glock 30SF since its compact and can use the G21 magazines."

"Ok and we'll need holsters and 4 spare magazines with magazine pouches."

"I'd recommend an IWB holster for the 21SF with 2 pouches and an ankle holster for the G30SF with an ankle magazine pouch for 2 more of the 21SF magazines since you can use the 21SF magazines in the G30."

"Ok, but no mas."

Later that evening after everyone had gone home, Jack and Mary were sitting in the main room watching the news on TV. There was some Special Report on crime in the country and about ½ way into the broadcast Jack started to cuss.

"Dang, Dang, Dang," Jack muttered.

"What's the matter Jack?" Mary asked.

"John was saying that the Sheriff busted a drug operation in the Forest last week," Jack explained. "Said we needed to stay armed all of the time. I ordered us some of those .45 ACP Glock's like the kids have so we don't have to lug around those Redhawks. I told Don and Rob to have the girls wearing theirs from now on, too. But until Saturday, we'd better strap on those Redhawks."

"Well, ok, if you insist," Mary replied.

John could have just been drumming up sales, as far as Jack knew, but it wouldn't hurt to be prepared. There was usually someone standing around the cabin with a shotgun with 1³/₈ ounce Black Magic slugs loaded so they had gotten out of the habit, like I said, of wearing the .44 magnums. Wild animals hadn't been a problem for quite a while. The area they were clearing was generally free of grizzly bears and the black bears hung around the campsites in the summer. Jack picked up the pistols and equipment on Saturday and Mary and he spent a fair amount of time on the Sheriff's range getting used to the guns. After that, everyone was armed all of the time. Of course, if you're prepared for trouble, it never shows up. That's one of Murphy's laws isn't it? Well, maybe not, but it should be.

It was along in September when TSHTF. Wasn't any of those darned drug dealers either. Somehow, the United States and the other foreign powers had managed to avoid a nuclear confrontation for 30 years. Russia and the US were now the best of friends unlike the days of the Cold War. France was still a pain in the arse, but they were just being French. Iran had been secretly building up stores of enriched uranium, as it later turned out. That thing back in 2004 had limited them to producing the low level enriched uranium for their nuclear reactors. There had been quite a stink at the time how North Korea and Iran were working together to develop missile born nuclear weapons.

North Korea never agreed to allow in inspectors and Iran had been playing a shell game. If you were paying attention to the news back in 2004, you might have recalled that Iran buried a whole factory or processing facility underground. The cameras in the spy satellites didn't see the next processing facility they built because instead of building the facility and covering it over, they mined it into existence. Did it right near a place where they quarried rock, as it turned out, and mingled the trucks in with the trucks from the quarry. None of that mattered at the moment, however.

Saturday, September 16, 2034 started out like any other day. Jack and Mary had gotten up early and driven into Meeker to pick up their handguns and ammo up and their sub-primal cuts so they could cut and package them. They vacuum packed the case of chickens first and then the pork. They had just put the last beef into the freezer when the phone rang.

"Jack, this is Allen," Allen's excited voice came over the phone. "Someone just launched a nuclear attack again the US. I've got the kids and John and Nancy are on their way over. I didn't know if you'd heard the news."

"We've been putting up our meat for the winter and haven't had the TV on Allen," Jack replied. "I'll call Rob and get him and Sam and the kids over here. Are you going to stay there for now or come over here?"

"I don't think that there's time for us to get there, Jack," Allen replied. "We'll be okay for now, I have plenty of supplies. Gotta go. Bye."

"Rob this is your Dad, have you heard the news?" Jack asked.

"We're just getting ready to leave, Dad, see you in 5 minutes," Rob replied and hung up.

"Mary, get the dogs and head to the shelter," Jack urged.

"What's going on Jack?" Mary asked.

"Allen says that someone is attacking the US with missiles," Jack replied.

"Who would do a thing like that?" Mary asked.

"Does it really matter?" Jack asked. "I'll clean out the gun safe and you get those dogs down to the shelter right now."

What a revolting development this was and it came right out of the blue. Hollywood hadn't even made a movie about nuclear war in the last 25 years. On the surface, the world appeared to be a fairly calm place in 2034. But, old hatreds and Heaven knows what else had finally all boiled over and the game was afoot. Jack made several trips hauling things to the shelter and Rob and Sam and the kids showed up. Sam got the radios disconnected and they turned on the TV to watch the war unfold. There wasn't much to see when it came right down to it, blink and another network went off the air as the missiles and warheads found their targets. The last thing they had seen was some minute old footage of the President being evacuated from the White House to Mt. Weather. And then, nothing. All of the networks were off the air and right in the middle of a local channel broadcast the satellite TV feed cut off entirely.

"I suppose that means that they knocked out the TV satellites," Jack said. "Sam you keep an ear turned to the radios and see what kind of news you can pick up."

"Dad, what's this all about?" Rob asked.

"I'll be darned if I know Rob," Jack admitted. "Mary you'd better pull one of those packages of meat out of the freezer before it's frozen solid, I expect that we'll be down here a while."

"I have Lane on 2-meters," Sam said.

"What's your situation over there, Lane?" Jack asked.

"We're all here and ok, Daddy," Lane replied. "Do you have any more idea what is going on than we do?"

"Nope. The TV went out and there's been no news that Sam's picked up on the radios, so we're in the dark," Jack replied. "Just stay buttoned up. Did Allen get any of those dosimeters?"

"I'll put him on the radio, standby," Lane said.

"What do you need to know, Jack?" Allen asked.

"Allen, did you get any of those dosimeters from KI4U, Inc.," Jack asked.

"Yeah, I bought a dozen, why?" Allen asked.

"I'd suggest that you charge them up and pass them out," Jack replied. "We're going to do the same."

"10-4," Allen replied. "Do you think that we're in any danger of fallout?"

"I've got a map here of the prevailing wind patterns," Jack replied, "We could get some fallout in this area, yes; it depends on where the US was targeted."

"I think that I have one of those maps, too, somewhere around here," Allen replied, "I'll have to look for it."

"The Sheriff's frequencies are probably going to be our best bet for getting information," Jack suggested.

"We're monitoring all frequencies Jack, I'll let you know if we hear anything," Allen replied.

"10-4, clear," Jack said.

Sorry to disappoint you if you were expecting a bunch of convicts to show up. But, I am only an observer and Hell, I didn't know that Iran and North Korea were going to make a coordinated attack on the US, Russia and Europe. It took everyone by surprise, apparently; so don't feel bad about it. It seems that after all of that stink back in 2004, North Korea and Iran had both begun constructing launch silos and processing plants and things like that with one eye on the sky. Maybe the US had screwed the pooch when they released all of those photos. It's maybe not a good idea to let a potential enemy know what your capabilities are.

Never start something that you cannot successfully finish. It seems that the world's nuclear powers hadn't exactly, strictly, complied with all of those disarmament agreements. They made a big show of shutting down this system and that system over the years, but it was a little like that deal back with the Cuban Missiles Crisis. When Jack Kennedy shut down those Jupiter missile facilities in Turkey, every single one of those Jupiter missiles was replaced by a seaborne nuke. Those had been Polaris missiles, back in the 1960's, but retiring a bunch of aging Peacekeeper missiles hadn't changed the US's posture one bit and apparently neither had any other nuclear power eliminated their weapon systems.

“Four-hundred fifty Minuteman III missiles are deployed at four bases in the north- and central United States: Minot AFB, North Dakota, Malmstrom AFB, Montana, and F. E. Warren AFB, Wyoming. Operational since 1968, the model “G” differs from the “F” in the third stage and reentry system. The third stage is larger and provides more thrust for a heavier payload. The payload, the Mark 12 reentry system, consists of a payload mounting platform, penetration aids, three reentry vehicles (RVs) and an aerodynamic shroud. The shroud protects the RVs during the early phases of flight. The mounting platform is also a “payload bus” and contains a restartable hypergolic rocket engine powered by hydrazine and nitrogen tetroxide. With this configuration, the RVs can be independently aimed at different targets within the missile's overall target area or "foot-print". This concept is known as Multiple Independently Targeted Reentry Vehicles (MIRV).”

Actually, there were 530 of the Minuteman III series J missiles in 2034. And despite removing 4 of the SSBN's from service and converting them to SSGN's the US still had a potent Trident D5 deployment. Add to that what the other friendly nuclear powers had hidden in their inventories and maybe you would begin to think of what was happening as TEOTWAWKI instead of TSHTF.

The Loner – Chapter 32 – Coping

And, thus it happened that on Saturday, September 16, 2034, the unimaginable happened and the world essentially blew itself back into the Dark Ages, literally. What's his name, Carl Sagan, had warned before he died about nuclear winter, but there couldn't be a nuclear winter if there weren't a nuclear war. Sagan had died in 1996 and it had taken nearly 40 years for his prophecy to come true. A few nukes wouldn't have had any large lasting effect, but between Iran and North Korea, Russia, the US and several European Capitols had been hit.

“The five established nuclear powers – the United States, Russia, China, France and Britain – possess enough nuclear warheads to obliterate the world many times over.” There was also India, Pakistan and Israel to consider with their nuclear arsenals. We can now confirm that North Korea and Iran actually did have nuclear weapons. A whole bunch of nuclear weapons; enough nuclear weapons that between them they could finally start WW III. So India and Pakistan had been at each other's throats for years over the Kashmir region and this was as good a time as any to join in the nuclear fray and blame it on someone else like China or North Korea or the Israelis. Both countries had exactly the same idea at exactly the same time and launched within minutes of each other. Of course, that staunch American ally, Israel took the opportunity to nuke every Arab nation within flying range of their aircraft.

Say, you wouldn't happen to know anyone with a big pile of firewood for sale, would you? Ain't no electricity and the petroleum delivery system is screwed up royally, and it's going to get cold really soon. Let's see, Jack had 574 cords and they increased that by 125 less what they had taken for themselves equaled $699 - 24 = 675$, which included what they'd sold to Allen. I wonder how much firewood was going for on October 1, 2034? Maybe that young kid who bought Jack's equipment would get rich after all. If he survived, that is. I was ok; I had that shelter in my backyard with the septic system, water, propane and everything. I didn't need any wood, for a while; thanks for asking. I don't know why I bothered, I was 91 in March of 2034, but I still had stories to write.

But wait, it gets better. North Korea had an ally in Beijing and when North Korea and Iran started WW III, the Chinese figured that they'd better get their licks in too. So, they attacked the US and Russia, only adding to the melee. Danged Russians and US would probably blame them anyway for supplying North Korea, which they had from time to time. The world went from having 10 nuclear powers to near total destruction. And everyone kept firing missiles until they had exhausted their supply. Who won WW III? Jeez, I don't really know, I think that everyone lost. Probably Africa, or South America or the Australians. Don't you believe that BS about 343 hours, either. It was safe to come out when the Survey Meter quit clicking and not a minute sooner. Don't have a Survey meter? Why not, KI4U, Inc. had 100,000 of them to refurbish and sell and 30 years to do it. There wasn't a lot of devastation in the state of Colorado, check those maps. The Iranians and North Korea didn't have THAT many nukes, but the Chinese did and between the 3 countries, Colorado had taken a few hits.

“Jack, this is Allen, come back,” the radio blared.

“Standby Allen,” Sam replied, “I’ll holler at Jack.”

“This is Jack, go ahead Allen,” Jack spoke into the mike.

“How much longer before we can come out of the shelter?” Allen asked.

“We still have some background radiation out here, how about you?” Jack replied.

“It’s down to 5 Rads,” Allen offered. “The Sheriff has his Deputies out and about on a limited basis.”

“10-4, we heard,” Jack replied.

MYTH #06: There would be no dangerous radioactivity after a couple of weeks.

“There is a wide range of misconceptions about what is safe and what is not. The matter is sufficiently complicated that a person should have professional advice. However, if there was no doctor going to be available to set a broken leg I presume you would go ahead and do the best you could. And if one had to build a bridge to get across a river and there was no structural engineer around, again I presume one would have a go at it.

“Doctors would like to have their x-ray machines available when setting a leg, and engineers would like to have their surveying equipment, specification guides, and computers or slide rules when they are building a bridge. So you can well imagine a radiological defense officer would like to have radiation detection equipment available when giving advice in a radiation defense situation.

“However, if the advice, expertise, or equipment, is not available, one must go on. One rule of thumb is that if there is not enough fallout that you can see it, then there is not enough of it that it will kill you. Fallout is usually small grain dust or grit, often having a light color, but not always. It depends upon its source. The best place to spot it is on a smooth surface, like the hood of a car.

“The more dense fallout is, probably the greater the hazard, although there isn’t necessarily a direct correlation. It may fall thick enough that quite a little heap of it may be brushed up from a surface that is one foot square. It is possible to build, from common materials found around the home, an expedient radiation detection meter. The details for such a meter are found in books listed in the bibliography.

“Even if one has commercially available radiation detection equipment there is still some considerable skill required in its use. For example, almost all survey equipment is designed to be used by an adult of normal stature. This means that if the equipment is held in the hand of a walking adult it will tell how much radiation is being received $3\frac{1}{2}$

feet above the ground, and particularly by the adults' vital organs which are above that level. A child's or an infant's vital organs will be below that level and will be exposed to much more hazardous levels than an adult's. For this reason, if one is passing through an area that is suspected to have any radiation at all, a child should be carried on an adult's shoulders.

"There is another rule of thumb that for every sevenfold increase in time radioactivity will decrease by tenfold. This is called the seven/ten rule. This is based upon standard decay. It is useful as an example, for training, and in building theoretical models, but in actual practice the decay rate is likely to be something quite different. It is determined by the isotopic composition of the matter under consideration.

"There is another commonly held misconception among semi-trained individuals that low levels of radiation cannot be rapidly fatal. Someone, after several days in the confines of a cramped expedient shelter, might conclude that because their meters now indicate a very low level of radioactivity (or perhaps no radioactivity if it is a high-range instrument), that it would now be all right to go outside and sleep on the ground in the cool breezes beneath the bright summer stars.

"The fallacy again arises from taking measurements at a level that assumes the vital organs are well above the radiation source. This is not the case when a person is stretched out on the ground for long hours of sleep. These long hours of low-level radiation exposure to the vital organs will result in a fatality in just a few days.

"Likewise, perfectly healthy adults who take infants out of the cramped, unpleasant, expedient shelter to allow them to play during the day on a blanket spread out on the ground will be quite shocked to see those infants sicken and die in just a few days while they themselves remain healthy. The infant's vital organs again being close to the weak radiation source for a long period while the adults' vital organs are being protected by distance."

"If it were me, I'd stay inside for a couple of more days, Allen," Jack said. "And, don't let the little kids out very much."

"10-4, Jack, we'll go slowly," Allen said.

"10-4, Jack clear," Jack acknowledged.

"Why can't we go out Dad?" Rob asked, "It's been 2 weeks."

"Well, Rob, radiation is accumulative," Jack said. "Look, I'll go out and have a quick look around. All of you stay here."

"Can't you use those cameras to look around?" Rob asked.

“I could if they worked, but they must have been taken out by the EMP, son,” Jack explained. “I don’t think anybody’s been around, or the dogs would have raised a fuss. Hand me that Survey Meter.”

Jack’s Survey Meter didn’t register any radiation. That didn’t mean that there wasn’t any, just that the level was low. The pile of firewood was intact and nothing looked disturbed. So, Jack went and tried to start his pickup but it was deader than a doornail. Well, that’s why he had all of those spare parts in the emergency kit of his for the vehicle. He had everything mentioned earlier plus new glow plugs, ignition system and computers. It had been a bad idea when those manufacturers had started putting computers on diesel trucks, but Jack was ready for that. The older trucks were okay and Jack had spare electronic everything for everyone’s vehicle. What was the use of only being partially prepared? He also had spare parts for the generators, spare batteries and radios. Like I said, he had spares for everything.

“Apart from injecting fuel according to the operator's demand for torque, the diesel fuel system must perform a secondary function, that of governing the engine. The pumping inefficiencies in a petrol engine increase with speed, imposing an upper limit on the latter and stabilizing idling. If the idle speed drops the pumping torque reduces, causing the engine to speed up again, and vice versa. Because this effect is not nearly so pronounced in the diesel, it has a natural tendency to stall at low speeds and, if no load is applied when fuel is injected, to accelerate up to speeds which can destroy the engine. Thus, instruments known as governors are attached to the fuel control device in pumps or injectors, in order to achieve a stable idle speed by adjustment of the fuelling level, and to cut off fuelling over the maximum safe speed. Traditionally, governors consisted of mechanisms using flyweights, levers and springs or pneumatic or hydraulic valves. However, the low cost and enormous flexibility of digital electronics combined with increasingly demanding emissions limits, fuel economy and drivability targets mean that electronic control is now predominating.”

Warning, Will Robinson! Warning! Danger, Will Robinson! Danger!

There you go, be sure to buy a vehicle with a diesel engine in case of EMP. So, maybe Jack was ahead of the curve for a change. He could get the vehicles of the expanded family up and running and he had his 7,000-gallons of diesel fuel plus Rob’s 7,000-gallons of diesel fuel available. There was plenty of food for the extended family between what he had and Allen had. They had guns and ammo and communications. What they didn’t have was so much sunlight. Carl Sagan had been right after all. And, just when it looked like his business was going to hell because the weather was warming up, this had to go and happen and put him right back in business. It was a shame that he’d sold that equipment to the kid for \$15,000, but who knew?

“Ok, we’re going to need to put some repair parts on some of the vehicles to get them up and running,” Jack explained. “But I was prepared for that. Rob, let’s get the vehicles up and we’ll transport parts into town to Allen’s and get their vehicles running.”

“Sure Dad, but I thought that a diesel engine wasn’t hurt by EMP,” Rob said.

“The engine is fine, Rob, but those electronic what-cha-ma-call-it’s are fried,” Jack said. “So, the engine can’t run as is. There’s a box in the storage room labeled for your pickup. You grab that one and I’ll grab the one for my new pickup.”

Jack checked his dosimeter and he was good. They got the two vehicles running, radios replaced and transported the repair parts for Lane’s pickup and Allen’s pickup to Jack’s pickup. He told Sam to give Allen a call and tell him they were on the way and to not shoot them when they showed up. Jack didn’t have spare parts for John’s car, but he did have those 2 pickups for his business and they ran just fine. When they arrived in Meeker at Allen’s home, Allen was waiting for them. Jack didn’t have any spare radios for Allen’s pickup, only for Lane’s. They got both vehicles up and the Lane’s radios replaced. Allen had new radios that he’d purchased for June’s car but never installed down in the shelter. They had one vehicle up and running for each family and Jack told John he could use a pickup until he could get a vehicle around.

They returned to the cabin and Rob continued on to check his place. Jack went downstairs to check on the kids and ladies. He checked his dosimeter and decided that he’d been outside enough for one day so he suggested that they stay in the shelter for another week. By that time, the background radiation should be sufficiently low that they could return to the cabin. He realized that it was Sunday, October 1st and that they had missed church for 3 Sundays in a row. Oh, well, they had been a little busy surviving to worry about church and there was always next Sunday.

Global Thermonuclear War. It sounds rather harmless; it’s just 3 little words. And, if you looked outside of the shelters, Meeker, CO wasn’t in too bad of a condition. But, if you looked on a map of the United States, all of the red states would be blue (sorrow) and the blue states red (blood). Countries intent on waging war tried to decapitate their opponents and then target the population centers. In the US, that meant that the coasts had been hit hard.

Nuclear winter is a hypothetical global climate condition that was predicted to be a possible outcome of a large-scale nuclear war. It was thought that severely cold weather would be caused by detonating large numbers of nuclear weapons, especially over flammable targets such as cities, where large amounts of smoke and soot would be injected into the Earth’s stratosphere.

This layer of particles would significantly reduce the amount of sunlight that reached the surface, and could potentially remain in the stratosphere for weeks or even years (smoke and soot arising from the burning petroleum fuels and plastics absorbs sunlight much more effectively than smoke from burning wood). The smoke and soot would be shepherded by strong west-to-east winds, forming a uniform belt of particles encircling the northern hemisphere from 30° to 60° latitude. These thick black clouds could block out much of the sun’s light for a period as long as several weeks, causing surface temperatures to drop by as much as 20°C for several weeks.

The combination of darkness and killing frosts, combined with high doses of radiation from nuclear fallout, would severely damage plant life in the region. The extreme cold, high radiation levels, and the widespread destruction of industrial, medical, and transportation infrastructures along with food supplies and crops would trigger a massive death toll from starvation, exposure, and disease. It was also thought that nitrogen oxides generated by the blasts would degrade the ozone layer, as had been observed in the first thermonuclear blasts, which had unanticipated degrading effects on the ozone. These effects have since been mitigated by ozone regeneration, but the effect of a full-scale war would undoubtedly be much greater. Secondary effects from ozone depletion (and concomitant increases in ultraviolet radiation) would be significant, with impacts on the viability of most human staple agricultural crops as well as disruption of ocean food chains by killing off phytoplankton.

One effort to predict the meteorological effects of a large-scale nuclear war was the 1983 "TTAPS" study (from the initials of the last names of its authors, R.P. Turco, O.B. Toon, T.P. Ackerman, J.B. Pollack, and Carl Sagan). The authors were inspired to write the paper by cooling effects due to dust storms on Mars and to carry out a calculation of the effect they used a simplified two dimensional model of the Earth's atmosphere that assumed that conditions at a given latitude were constant. The consensus with more sophisticated calculations is that the atmospheric model used in TTAPS probably overestimates the degree of cooling although the amount of this overestimation remains unclear. Although such nuclear war would undoubtedly be devastating, the degree of damage to life on Earth as a whole remains controversial.

The Loner – Chapter 33 – Old Man Winter

The young guy who bought Jack's equipment showed up the week they left the shelter and went back to the cabin. He wanted to know did Jack want to buy his equipment back? He'd tried cutting timber for a week and between getting charged by a bear, not being able to get anyone to help him and who knows what else, decided that he wasn't cut out to be a firewood producer. Jack asked him how much he wanted for the equipment, figuring he'd get held up. The kid said that if he could just get his money back, he was going to get on the road and head out. Jack told the kid to meet him at the bank in Meeker. If they were open, the kid had himself a deal.

It had been a bitch for the bank to get their doors open, but they had computer printouts and worked from them. San Francisco said it would be at least a month before the computers system was back on line. San Francisco, as in that community in southern Oregon where Wells Fargo actually had it computers; the actual city of San Francisco, according to the bank, was toast. So was every major city in the world. Large parts of the US had actually escaped direct injury in the nuclear exchanges. The big cities were gone, as were some military installations, but the government was more or less intact. Several countries had ceased to exist. The US had only targeted the three countries that had attacked the US, but some countries weren't so discerning. The Iranians had nuked Israel and Israel had most of its nuclear arsenal airborne and worked over the Middle East pretty good.

The bank said that they had limited cash and while they could handle the immediate transaction and give Jack \$5,000 to keep him going, they would be limiting him to \$2,500 a week until they got in more currency. With the government still running, Jack decided that he would still accept greenbacks for his firewood. The reason that the currency went bad was that either there was no government to back it up or that the people had lost faith in those little pieces of paper. He wasn't going to be the one to start that snowball running downhill. But, with the banking system on the fritz, he wouldn't accept checks. His was strictly a cash and carry business.

The phones were out so Jack stopped by the Sheriff's office and told him that he had 675 cords of firewood split and stacked if anyone needed any. He didn't expect the Sheriff to be his go between but if anyone needed some wood, to give him a call on the radio and someone would make the delivery. The price was \$250 a cord, delivered. The Sheriff knew the going rate had been \$200 and asked Jack about that. Jack told him that there would probably be a shortage of fuel and everything else and he expected his expenses would rise sharply. But, said Jack, if someone else wanted to sell firewood for \$200 a cord, it was fine with him, his price was \$250 a cord delivered, \$225 picked up.

Those splitters Jack had were used when he bought them and had probably traveled from Egypt to the Promised Land with Moses. New splitters, or so he had heard, just needed to be fed and they spit out a cord an hour. You use what you have and what Jack had was 4 old pickups with trailers in running order, 4 chainsaws, 2 old splitters, 14,000-gallons of diesel and 300-gallons of gas. He needed more gas so he went back

into Meeker after the kid delivered his equipment and found a 500-gallon tank on wheels. He filled it up at \$4 a gallon with gasoline and bought extra parts for his chainsaws. And then, Rob, Don and he headed out into the woods to harvest what timber they could before the snow got too deep. They got in 30 good days before the snow hit and were hauling in almost 10 cords a day.

When the snow put them out of business, they gave up for the season. Altogether, they had cut and split 290 cords, not bad for some late season work. Lane and Don and the kids had moved in with them for the duration and John and Nancy were staying with Allen and June. The women took turns watching the kids and splitting the firewood and never were more than a day behind the men, even though they took time out for deliveries. They sold the whole kit and caboodle, 965 cords at \$250 a cord, netting them $965 \times \$235 = \$226,775$. Which was good, because during those 30 days, gas went up to \$6 a gallon and diesel to \$6.50. And, there wasn't much food left in the grocery stores.

And let me tell you something else; people didn't mind paying the \$250 a cord because some of the other guys wanted \$300 a cord, picked up. And Jack accepted greenbacks while some of the others wanted silver or gold. Jack had it on good authority from the Sheriff that the government was already moving to rescue people and restore some kind of order. And, while some merchants wanted gold or silver, many more still accepted the Federal Reserve Notes. John had emptied out his store and moved everything to Allen's shelter. Most of the people in Meeker already had guns, but he was doing a land office business in ammo.

It hadn't taken all that long for the sky to fill with smoke and soot and all of that other stuff. They were working in a near twilight during most of the 30 days. They kept wearing the dosimeters, just in case, and kept a log of everyone's accumulated radiation. They were well within the safety levels. I can't imagine what it must have been like for those people working in near twilight conditions harvesting firewood. Awful, no doubt; they kept getting orders and kept cutting wood until Nature gave out. They wouldn't have needed to do that, you know, they each had 25 cords of firewood. School was suspended indefinitely because of the national emergency. Emergency, hell, disaster was being nice.

Communications purely stunk. Those EMP's had fried a lot of electronics and neither radio nor TV stations were getting on the air. What information there was in the Meeker area came through the Sheriff's office. The Sheriff had learned that Colorado Springs had taken several hits, probably because of NORAD, and that Denver had taken a single 5mT nuke. Cheyenne, WY had the crap kicked out of it for whatever reason. Omaha, NE was also badly hit. Say isn't the SAC headquarters in Nebraska? Seattle, Portland, San Francisco, Los Angeles and San Diego were in ruins. (Hey nobody hit Palmdale!) Denver, Chicago, Dallas, Houston, Cleveland, New York, Philadelphia, Boston, Atlanta, well, you get the idea; if it was a major population center it was in ruins.

In the twilight that was the aftermath, the temperatures fell to new lows surpassing even the lows of that climate change while Nature healed the planet. It was different though;

Nature would be a long time healing these scars. Sagan had been right about some things but wrong about the forests burning. There just weren't any nuclear targets in National Forests, or he might have been right. But, the cities burned and the Carbon Dioxide in the air climbed rapidly, forcing Nature to react in the only way she knew. It didn't really look like the French would be exporting wine or the Germans Mercedes; Europe was more concentrated than the US and the consequential damage more far-reaching. Maybe this was the war to end all wars because nobody had any nukes left.

"I figure that we have enough food among us to last us a couple of years," Jack announced looking up from his laptop. "We have plenty of cash on hand, but there's nothing much to buy."

"What's the point?" Mary asked. "The world is in shambles and will never be the same."

"Well, we have grandchildren, Mary, and the world will come around," Jack said. "Keep your chin up, it could have been worse."

"How?" she asked.

"We could be dead," Jack answered curtly.

"Aren't we?" Mary asked. "The sky is dark and it's so cold outside that the dogs don't even want to go out to pee."

"Mary, for crying out loud," Jack said, "What's gotten into you?"

"I guess I'm just depressed, sorry Jack," she replied.

"Well who wouldn't be depressed, honey," he asked, "But it really isn't the end of the world, it just seems like it. Everyone in our family is alive and we have food and supplies. Rob and Sam are just down the road and Lane, Don and the kids are here."

The next day a patrol car came by. The Deputy came to the house and pounded on the door. It was the same Deputy from so many years before, older and a little heavier, but cheerful. You remember him because he returned the coffee jug. His name was Jeb Stanton.

"Come in Jeb, have a cup of coffee," Jack said.

"Don't mind if I do, Jack," Jeb replied. "The Sheriff sent me out because he didn't want this on the radio. They're out of food in town and we aren't getting any supplies in."

"Anything we can do to help?" Jack asked.

"That's why I'm here, Jack, thanks for the coffee Mary," Jeb continued, "The Sheriff wants you and the boys to get out and kill deer or elk or any game you can find. You're

one of the few people who know the Forest as well as the Rangers. They're out hunting, to the south. How about you and Rob and Don hunt to the north?"

"Ok, we'll fire up the Snow Cat and go hunting Jeb, any limit on the meat?" Jack responded.

"You can't kill them all, but the population of Meeker is right at 2,500 at the moment, so all you can get," Jeb replied.

"Ok, we'll go out immediately," Jack said.

"You'd better take the M1A's and use the suppressors," Jeb said. "There are other people out there and if they hear you, they may try to take what you have."

"Ok, M1A's with suppressors," Jack agreed, "I have some of that Black Hills 175gr ammo we can use."

"It might sound silly, Jack but so the Sheriff can know what your progress is, an elk is a mama, a deer is a daddy and everything else is a kid," Jeb chuckled. "Hey, don't blame me; it's the Sheriff's idea. Give him a call when you get something and we'll keep track. Also give us your GPS coordinates."

"Well, are we done talking?" Jack chuckled, "We'd better get out there; it's not getting any lighter."

"Ok, ok, but it's not getting any darker either," Jeb said.

"Don, you start loading up those magazines with the .308 hunting ammo and I'll get that Snow Cat fired up," Jack directed.

About 15 minutes later, they were on the way to Rob's, having told him by radio to load his 7.62 mags with ammo and to standby. They drove into the forest and headed for an area where they'd seen quite a few signs of elk. No luck there so they moved to an area where there was a big herd of deer most of the time. Now they got lucky and shot 6 deer before the herd wised up and spooked.

"Sheriff, this is the Snow Cat," Jack said.

"Go ahead Snow Cat," the dispatcher responded.

"We have 6 daddy's here," Jack transmitted. "Coordinates unavailable."

"10-4, 6 daddy's," the dispatcher replied. "Continue search."

That seemed plain enough so they tried another elk area and came up blank. A search of third area revealed a small herd of elk, but they only got 3 before the herd spooked.

“Sheriff, this is the Snow Cat,” Jack said.

“Go ahead Snow Cat,” the dispatcher responded.

“We have 3 mama’s here,” Jack transmitted. “Coordinates unavailable.”

“10-4 3 mama’s,” the dispatcher responded. “You have a problem with your GPS?”

“10-4, GPS out-of service,” Jack responded.

“10-4,” the dispatcher responded.

“There’s nothing wrong with the GPS, Dad,” Rob said.

“I know, but I don’t want any eavesdroppers having our location,” Jack explained.

“What now?” Don asked.

“We’ll try one more spot and call it a day,” Jack replied.

Jack had seen a big herd of deer one day and he saved this spot for last. They got fairly close without spooking the deer and dismounted. The range was about 300-yards. This was a pretty long shot in the dim light, so they moved closer on foot. About 100-yards out one of the deer raised its head as if to listen. They froze and eventually the deer went back to grazing. The 3 men each picked 4 targets and whispered the information among themselves. They got 10 deer for 12 shots, and would have had the other two had the herd not spooked. They loaded the animals on the roof with the others and Jack called in.

“Sheriff, this is the Snow Cat,” Jack said.

“Go ahead Snow Cat,” the dispatcher responded.

“We have 10 daddy’s here,” Jack transmitted. “Coordinates unavailable.”

“10-4, 10 daddy’s,” the dispatcher replied. “RTB.”

It took about 45 minutes to get back to the cabin and another 30 minutes to get to town. 16 deer and 3 elk would make a lot of soup.

“We shot the first deer right here,” Jack said pointing to the map for the Sheriff. “We got the elk here and the last 10 deer here.”

“I’ll have someone look at your GPS unit,” the Sheriff said.

“There’s nothing wrong with our GPS, Sheriff, but we need a military style grid coordinate system instead of GPS coordinates,” Jack responded.

“Ok, Jack, I’ll mark up a map and have a Deputy bring it out to you,” the Sheriff said. “How does it feel to have an unlimited hunting season?”

“We can’t keep this up for long, Sheriff, the game population can’t stand that much hunting pressure, especially if you have the Park Rangers and a bunch of other people out there hunting,” Jack commented.

“Well, you brought in about 2 tons of meat so that should keep us for a couple of days,” the Sheriff said. “We should be getting supplies from the Army any day now.”

“Those might be famous last words Sheriff,” Jack said, “It might be weeks before we get any help from the Army.”

“I hope you’re wrong about that, Jack,” the Sheriff said.

“So do I Sheriff,” Jack agreed. “We’ll go out as soon as you give us a map. I sure hope the snow holds off.”

“I do too Jack,” the Sheriff replied.

They went back to the Rob’s and dropped him off and then to the cabin.

“How did it go?” Mary asked.

“We shot 16 deer and 3 elk,” Jack replied. “The Sheriff is fixing us up with a map with grid coordinates so we can communicate our location without alerting the world to where we are getting the game.”

“When are you going out again?” Mary asked.

“Whenever we get the map,” Jack said, “Probably a couple of days.”

The Loner – Chapter 34 – Meat Hunters

It was clear to everyone that Jack didn't relish his role as a meat hunter. The very idea of them hunting meat for the town of Meeker was repulsive. And, who was to say that the game wasn't contaminated? Probably the fact that the game was still alive and apparently healthy was the only indication that any of them had that that wasn't the case. And, he didn't dare take the treads off of the Snow Cat for fear that they'd get out in the forest and it would start to snow, again. If that happened they could end up being up the Creek without a paddle.

The next morning, Jeb was back at 7am. Meeker had enough meat for today, but the Sheriff wasn't able to contact the Army. He wanted them to go out one more time and use the map Jeb had with him to radio in their kills and locations. The map was a topo map of the northern section of the White River National Forest. The Sheriff had labeled the map's vertical lines (longitude) with numbers, such as 1, 2, 3 and the lesser lines as .1, .2, etc. The map's horizontal lines (latitude) were labeled A, B, C and the lesser horizontal lines as .1, .2, etc. A grid coordinate would read something like B.4 plus 2.4. Jack and the boys had never been in the military and as far as he/they knew this system was as good as any. It would give their approximate location, and if they got into serious trouble, they could always give their GPS coordinates. And anyone with a lick of sense could probably figure out the system, but they wouldn't know whether the letters and numbers were latitude or longitude.

Lane gave Rob a heads up while Jack and Don prepared for the hunt. They loaded up their magazines and got their M1A's and went to pick up Rob. Sam said that she and the kids were going over to the cabin to be with Mary and Lane and the kids. She should have done that last time, but she had radios if she really needed to get in touch with Rob.

"Let's just hunt deer, Dad," Rob suggested. "They are a lot more plentiful than elk."

"Ok, where do you want to start?" Jack asked.

"Let's hit the same locations in reverse order," Rob suggested.

"That makes sense," Jack said, "They had plenty of browse in those spots. Steer us to the first spot."

The deer had returned to the last location they'd hit and they got 8 of them before they spooked. One thing they hadn't done was gut the deer right on the spot on the previous hunt and they did the same thing on this day.

"Sheriff, this is the Snow Cat," Jack said.

"Go ahead Snow Cat," the dispatcher responded.

"We have 8 daddy's here," Jack transmitted. "Coordinates D.6 plus 3.3."

"10-4, 8 daddy's, at D.6 plus 3.3" the dispatcher replied. "Continue search."

"I don't like this one bit," Jack muttered loud enough for everyone to hear. "Ok, go to the other area where we found deer browsing."

Rob pointed the Snow Cat in the direction of the other browse and they arrived there in 40 minutes. While it had been a small herd the last time, there must have been 40 deer gathered around browsing. Rob stopped the Cat and they quietly made their way into about 75-yards range. They shot 13 deer and quit. When they rose to gather the carcasses, the herd spooked and took off like they'd heard a shot. Rob pulled the Snow Cat up and they loaded the animals in the back and on the roof.

"Sheriff, this is the Snow Cat," Jack said.

"Go ahead Snow Cat," the dispatcher responded.

"We have 13 daddy's here," Jack transmitted. "Coordinates C.4 plus 4.2."

"10-4, 13 daddy's, at C.4 plus 4.2" the dispatcher replied. "Continue search."

"Negative dispatch, we are RTB," Jack said.

"Say again Snow Cat," the dispatcher responded.

"This is Snow Cat and we are RTB," Jack said, "Over and out."

"Screw 'em, I'm not going to slaughter any more deer today," Jack told the boys. "They have the locations now, let the Deputies slaughter the deer. Point this sum bit towards home."

"Ok, Dad, you're the boss," Rob said. "You're in fine voice today."

"Rob, I'm not opposed to hunting game, but what we're doing is slaughter," Jack said. "Using those suppressors most certainly isn't hunting. I know that they use them in Europe, but people in this country are more sportsmen like than those Europeans. They can get their own meat. I'll let them use the Snow Cat, if they furnish the fuel."

"You might feel differently about that if you were one of the people in Meeker," Don suggested.

"If I were one of the people in Meeker, I'd have my butt in the forest getting my own game," Jack snapped.

That was the end of that conversation and they returned to the cabin in silence. When they got there, they loaded the deer into the back of a pickup and a trailer and hauled them to town. Jack cornered the Sheriff and gave him the facts of life. The Sheriff's Department was welcome to borrow the Snow Cat so long as they provided the fuel and the personnel. But, as far as he was concerned, they weren't going after any more deer or elk themselves. He also told the Sheriff that the two locations where they gotten the deer were now on the Sheriff's map and by golly, he couldn't remember where they'd shot those 3 elk on the earlier hunt. Old age must be affecting his memory, he claimed.

They returned to the cabin and Mary put out a nice dinner for everyone with the help of Lane and Sam. Apparently the women had got into a discussion about what the long-term effects of the radiation might be on their reproductive health. That hadn't really drawn any conclusions and Jack suggested that since they had done their last hunt for the folks in Meeker, the girls run to town tomorrow and check with the doc. Jack told them to take the dosimeter log with them because it would give doc all of the information they had about their total exposure. BTW, the sky might have been just a half shade lighter.

You gotta know that the next morning around 7am a patrol car pulled in with 6 Deputies and/or outfitters. They had 6 cans of diesel fuel for the Snow Cat. Well, what could Jack do, they'd laid out the guidelines, but those folks in Meeker must have big appetites. Actually, it was nothing of the sort, the Sheriff had finally contacted the Army and they told him they had a shipment of staples in route. They also told him that one hell of a snowstorm was blowing in, in about 2 days' time. The Sheriff really had no choice if the people in Meeker were going to eat through the snowstorm.

The women left for town about 9am and Jack, Don and Rob gathered around the radio to see what that crowd of hunters came up with. The Deputies and outfitters borrowed a trailer, too to haul the carcasses. The first call came around 10am.

"Sheriff, this is the Snow Cat," Jeb said.

"Go ahead Snow Cat," the dispatcher responded.

"We have 20 daddy's here," Jeb transmitted. "Coordinates C.4 plus 4.2."

"10-4, 20 daddy's, at C.4 plus 4.2" the dispatcher replied. "Continue search."

"10-4 dispatch."

About an hour later, another call came.

"Sheriff, this is the Snow Cat," Jeb said.

"We have 18 daddy's here," Jeb transmitted. "Coordinates D.6 plus 3.3."

“10-4, 18 daddy’s, at D.6 plus 3.3” the dispatcher replied. “Continue search.”

“10-4 dispatch.”

“What the hell are they doing,” Jack half screamed. “I may renege on they’re using that Snow Cat, darn it all to hell.”

“Sheriff, this is Jack, come back,” Jack radioed.

“Sheriff here,” the Sheriff responded.

“What the hell are your boys doing out there?” Jack demanded. “They already shot 38 deer and you’re having them continue the search.”

“10-4 Jack,” the Sheriff said, “We have a large winter storm blowing in, in a couple of days and won’t be able to hunt for up to a week.”

“10-4, Sheriff,” Jack muttered into the mile. “I’m coming to town.”

Jack was steaming. Snow would have melted 3 feet before it hit his body. He piled in his shiny new pickup and headed to town. The Sheriff and he really went at it, but Jack was realizing that the Sheriff was a determined man. Before Jack could leave, another radio call came in.

“Sheriff, this is the Snow Cat,” Jeb said.

“We have 10 mamas here,” Jeb transmitted. “Coordinates E.2 plus 4.4.”

“10-4, 10 mamas, at E.2 plus 4.4” the dispatcher replied. “RTB.”

“10-4 dispatch, RTB.”

“10 elk and 38 deer,” Jack almost shouted. “Sheriff, you couldn’t even be into the meat we killed yesterday, yet.”

“You’re right Jack,” the Sheriff admitted, “But put yourself in my shoes. We have a winter storm blowing in and the Army only promised the food, they haven’t delivered it yet.”

“Fine Sheriff, but I’m not sure how much longer I can be a party to this,” Jack said plainly enough.

“Jack I know how you feel,” the Sheriff said. “You’re a man with principles and I wouldn’t have it any other way. But, people have to eat Jack. Don’t you think that if I could find another way I’d do that instead?”

“I suppose so, yes,” Jack admitted.

"I'll see if we can get one of the Snow Cats from the Forest Service or one of the Recreation Areas, if that will help," the Sheriff offered.

"Won't help much Sheriff, but it is a good idea," Jack replied. "That Snow Cat we have is primarily a transportation vehicle, not a work vehicle. I'll keep my opinions to myself from now on."

"We have some preliminary death tolls, Jack," the Sheriff changed the subject. "At the moment they have about 35 million confirmed fatalities and more people dying every day."

"They figure out who was behind it?" Jack asked.

"Iran, North Korea and China," the Sheriff replied.

"The Axis of Evil?" Jack said, "I guess that sort of figures, doesn't it?"

"They're the Axis of nothing now, buddy," the Sheriff said. "Those countries are nothing but glowing parking lots."

"Why'd they do it?" Jack asked.

"Hell, I don't know. Because they could?" the Sheriff asked perhaps rhetorically. "Jack, you know as well as I do that North Korea and Iran have been playing games over their nuclear programs for almost 35 years, maybe longer. China was a backdoor supporter of North Korea from time to time. I'm guessing that when Iran and North Korea decided to start WW III, China joined in because they'd get blamed anyway."

"So what's the story on provisions for Meeker?" Jack asked.

"Army is sending 3 semi's, one with beans and rice, one with flour, sugar and other core staples, and one with paper products," the Sheriff replied.

"Where did they get all of that?" Jack asked.

"Commandeered a few grocery wholesalers, I'm guessing," the Sheriff replied. "Of course, they aren't bringing any meat, but I may convert the people in this town into vegetarians before this is over."

"You the top dog running the emergency management services in Meeker?" Jack asked.

"Sorta, yes," the Sheriff said. "I didn't ask for the job but they took out the government offices in Denver and I ended up with it. It's the same in a lot of the rural counties without large cities."

[If they ever made this story into a movie, LOL, I could picture Fred Dalton Thompson as the Sheriff. We'd hire Kathy Ireland as Mary and Harrison Ford as Jack.]

"Well, I've got to get home, Sheriff. You say that storm is due in tomorrow?" Jack responded.

"Tomorrow morning, Jack," the Sheriff replied.

"Sheriff," a breathless Deputy burst into the room, "The Army is here with those 3 semi's."

Jack watched as the Sheriff inspected the loads. The semis were carrying just what the Sheriff described. The third semi-trailer had paper products and an assortment of miscellaneous items like spices, margarine and the like. The core staples were 20 different kinds of pasta, sauces and some canned vegetables. Jack headed home because he wanted to know what the ladies had found out from the doc.

"Doc was impressed that we had a log and knew exactly how much radiation that everyone had been exposed to," Mary said. "That extra week in the shelter probably did the trick, according to him. Everyone is way below the safe doses. In fact, the only person to get more than a low dose was you, Jack."

"So, I'll get cancer when I'm 80, big deal," Jack tried to dismiss the news. "But the girls can have more babies if they want? And, there will be no problems?"

"Everyone is fine Jack," Mary said, "Relax."

"They have food in Meeker, now and that storm is supposed to arrive tomorrow morning," Jack filled them in.

"I wouldn't be so sure of that, Jack," Don said, "Look out the window."

It had started to snow, gently. But as the day wore on, the snowfall kept increasing. Jack figured that the storm would put an end to the hunting for a while, anyway. Those trucks made it to Meeker in just the nick of time. Rob, Sam and the kids headed home before they got snowed in. Not that they would mind being snowed in, but it would be a whole lot nicer if they were home when it happened.

"Jack, this is the Sheriff, are you standing by?" the radio call came.

"I'm here Sheriff, go ahead," Jack responded.

"I hate to do this to you, but do you remember that young kid that you sold your equipment to and then bought it back from?" the Sheriff asked. Was there anything that happened in Meeker that the Sheriff didn't know about?

“10-4 Sheriff, what about him?” Jack asked.

“He’s out in the Forest, hunting and long overdue,” the Sheriff said. “How’s about you and the boys go looking for him?”

“Dang it, do you have an approximate location, Sheriff?” Jack asked.

“If you still have that hunting map, coordinates D.4 plus 3.9,” the Sheriff said.

“10-4, we’ll go looking,” Jack responded. “Lane, you call your brother and tell him to get ready. Don, you’d better bundle up good, it’s going to be cold out there.”

They drove the Snow Cat down to Rob’s and Rob took over as driver with Jack providing directions. They went to D.4 plus 3.9 but there wasn’t any sign of the kid. By this time the snow was coming down at a steady rate, but the wind hadn’t come up.

“Let’s drive in an expanding square spiral until we find him,” Jack suggested.

They found the kid at D.6 plus 3.3, the same coordinates where that hunting party had taken 18 deer. The kid, his name was Raymond Thorpe, had a deer and had apparently slipped carrying it back to town spraining the crap out of something.

“Sheriff, this is the Snow Cat,” Jack radioed.

“Go ahead Snow Cat,” the dispatcher responded.

“Rescue complete at D.6 plus 3.3. We are RTB. No medical attention required,” Jack informed them.

“10-4, rescue complete at D.6 plus 3.3, RTB, NMA (Mo Message Attached),” the dispatcher repeated back.

“10-4, Snow Cat out,” Jack said.

“What in the hell were you thinking of kid?” Jack asked.

“My folks are hungry, and we didn’t know if those truckloads of food would show up,” Ray said. “I overheard them talking about where they got the deer and came out to get me one.”

“The trucks arrived in town and everyone has food,” Jack explained. “You’re going to have to stay with us until the storm is over.”

“Thanks for rescuing me, Mr. Summers, my name is Ray Thorpe,” the kid said.

“I thought you were leaving town, Ray,” Jack observed.

“I was, but there was no place to go,” Ray admitted.

The Loner – Chapter 35 – New Forms of Currency

A whole lot of people believe that when TSHTF or TEOTWAWKI comes, gold and silver will replace paper currency. That presumes some things and counts on other assumptions. You can't eat paper or gold or silver. Jack had it in mind that things of a more practical nature would become the stock in trade. Things like food and firewood, just to name a couple. He had a couple of Maple Leafs and a bag of the old 1920's era silver dollars, but not so many. What he did have, for currency, was a whole lot of those seed packs from Walton Feed. And a whole forest full of wood for the taking.

"So tell me Ray, are you always so impulsive?" Jack asked.

"What do you mean by that Mr. Summers?" Ray asked.

"You bought that equipment and then turned around and sold it right back to me," Jack recounted.

"I like the firewood business, Mr. Summers, but it's not something one man can do alone," Ray replied.

"That's good to hear, Ray," Jack said, "I figure that there's going to be one heck of a demand for firewood for the next few years, how would you like to throw in with us?"

"Where did you get those wood splitters?" Ray asked, "An antique store? There's a fella down in Grand Junction who has splitters that will do a cord an hour. If you want to go partners, I'll get myself down there and buy one."

"The way that I've always run this business Ray is that it's a partnership and everyone is an equal partner," Jack explained. "We have 3 families here with 2 adults each and that's 6 shares. If you want to be a partner, we can make that 7 shares. I have more money than I know what to do with, so I'll buy the splitters."

"Word is that he's only taking gold or silver for that equipment," Ray said.

"Well, John's been taking greenbacks and gold and silver for ammo, so maybe I can get some from him," Jack replied. "I only have a couple of Maple Leafs and a bag of old silver dollars."

What that fella in Grand Junction had was 2 commercial-duty firewood splitters from Iron & Oak. They were the 30-ton model with a 13cm cylinder. They were completely towable with 5cm ball & fenders. They had Beam H-D 20cm H- Beam Reinforced Highway Tires & chains 57cm (12x20cm). The log opening was 63.5cm. They had a Control Valve Auto Return Cycle Time of 12 seconds and an oil capacity (hydraulic) with a 37 liter Wedge Height (standard 4-way) 57cm Log Opening 63.4 Cylinder Stroke 61cm Hydraulic Gear Pump 3-stage 83 pm. He also had different wedges.

John was willing to sell Jack gold and silver at the going rates. Jack wasn't sure how much the guy in Grand Junction would try and hold him up, so he bought \$25,000 worth and added it to what he already had. Ray said that those splitters went for about \$5,500 each plus the price of the different splitting wedge. When the snow let up, they drove down 13 to I-70 and over to Grand Junction. The guy was asking for the equivalent of \$10,000 each for the splitters in gold. So, they haggled and haggled some more. They eventually agreed on \$15,000 in gold for the pair, including the optional splitting wedges. Good thing, too because Jack was getting very tired of that man and more than once thought about pulling out the Redhawk and showing the man what they did to grizzly bears.

"So, Ray, we'll get you a Redhawk and you can work in the woods with us," Jack said on the way back to Meeker.

"There's grizzly bears in those woods?" Ray asked.

"That's why we have dogs and the Redhawks," Jack explained. "But hell Ray, we have a truce with the grizz, they take care of the eco-terrorists for us. I figure that we can take the 4 old pickups to the woods to cut timber. We can round up 3 more trailers for the women to deliver the wood."

"What about my girlfriend?" Ray asked. "She said she'd be willing to work splitting and delivering. And I got a diesel pickup that can pull a trailer. It's old, but it runs good."

"Ok, we'll get 4 trailers if we can find them," Jack said.

"I only bought your equipment because that was all I could afford," Ray said. "I know where we can get 4 new trailers and 4 new chainsaws."

"Well ok, partner," Jack laughed, "It appears that we're back in the firewood business big time."

I mentioned that Jack figured that firewood and food would be the new currency. He had several cases of the Walton Feed seed packs in the shelter. Each #10 can contained 1 each seed packet of tomato, carrot, squash, cabbage, onion, zucchini, swiss chard, cucumber, lettuce, radish, pepper, beet, spinach, and 4 packets each of beans, peas and corn (25 packets total). The seeds were non-hybrid specially dried to assure long life. Each 5.6 C. (10.08F) drop in temperature doubled the storage life of the seeds and it was normally about 56° in the shelter. Jack had 12 cases of the #10 cans, 6 to the case.

It snowed a lot the winter of 2034-2035. That was good because it slowly cleaned the air of the suspended particulate matter. Jack gave Allen one case of the seeds to split between them and John and Nancy. He gave 8 cases to the Sheriff together with an invoice for just what he'd paid for the seed, original invoice attached. The Army kept up the shipments of food and supplies, but they were irregular as hell. The people in Meeker began to hoard food in case the trucks were late, which they often were. They

bought the 4 trailers and 4 chainsaws and all of the spare parts they could get. John sold Ray a Redhawk at 10% over cost and Jack supplied Ray with the Buffalo Bore ammunition.

The government finally got National Public Radio back on the air and there were a series of announcements and Executive Orders, but the folks in western Colorado just ignored them for the most part and clung to the business of survival. And, come spring, nobody filed any tax returns because there wasn't any way to mail them. Ray's mother and sister also offered to help with the gardening so that the ladies could split and deliver firewood. Fuel was getting hard to come by and Jack found a second 500-gallon trailer and had it filled with gas at \$10 a gallon. Ouch!

In the still twilight of April 2035 before the snow was even completely gone, Jack, Rob, Don and Ray headed to the National Forest. Jack had checked with a Ranger and had been told that they had no idea what was going on but to help themselves to the deadfalls. They went out in the Snow Cat and began cutting logs. All they had to haul with was the sled, so they began to accumulate a lot of wood in the forest. They were back to working from dawn to dusk, 6½ days a week. The thing was, dawn to dusk wasn't a long day barely 8 hours. In Meeker, the people cleared out a greenhouse and planted all of the seeds.

It was time for TSTHF big time because FEMA finally moved beyond the big cities and into the rural areas. With virtually no help except that provided by the Army, and that was a sometimes thing, the Sheriff had managed to get the people of Meeker through the winter. They hadn't had a problem with disease, probably because of the cold weather. Well, there was that spat of flu and a few older folks died, but there was no flu vaccine and that couldn't be helped. About those FEMA folks, I think I know where in the forest they buried their bodies, but I'm not really sure. Just in case, they filled out death certificates and listed the cause of death as 'hunting accident'. There was some story circulating that the FEMA folks went looking for deer in the forest and got charged by a bear and ended up shooting each other. Ok, but how come all of the bullet holes were in the back of their heads?

Once the snow cleared out, the ladies began to gather and haul the wood in from the forest and to use those new splitters. Marge (Ray's mom) and Loretta (his sister) did very well in the garden once Mary and Sam rototilled it for them. Lena (the girlfriend) was a scrappy gal about Sam and Lane's size and before long in pretty good condition. When there was still snow on the ground, they were only doing about 12 cords a day. Once the snow melted off, the 4 men cranked that up to 14 a day. Jack kept the price of the wood at \$250 a cord, but tacked on a surcharge, just to cover the extra cost of the fuel needed to make the deliveries.

They doubled the size of the garden, too because there were more mouths to feed. The children were getting bigger so their appetites increased and there were Ray's 4 people. They had started Monday April 2, 2035 in the woods and by the end of April had 325 cords of wood cut and 81 of those cords hauled in and split. The first week of May saw

them cut another 66 cords and haul in 19 cords. Starting the second week of May, and through the 3rd of June, they harvested another 364 cords of firewood. The Sheriff let Jack know that people from as far away as Rifle and Glenwood Springs were looking for firewood. The fuel to deliver that far was prohibitive, so Jack got together with Allen and set up a lot in Meeker where people could come and get firewood. They retailed it at \$255 a cord, cash and carry, which was the \$250 a cord plus the delivery surcharge to Meeker.

The way that worked was the ladies would haul the wood to Meeker and stack it in 1-cord piles. When a customer came in, Allen would write up a receipt and put their name on an index card that he stapled to the pile of firewood. Then, they were at their leisure to haul the wood. The lot was fenced in and the Deputies made regular passes in their patrol cars 24/7. Over the course of the summer, when the Army saw what the people in Meeker had going for them, they delivered 2 semi loads of quart jars, rings and lids. FEMA never came back.

June, through July 1, resulted in another 364 cords being harvested from the forest. By this time, they had completely cut out deliveries and were just selling firewood from the lot in Meeker. July, through August 5 produced another 441 cords of wood. It would have been 455, but they took off Independence Day. On the 4th of July, the banker showed up. It seems that Jack had just about cornered the market on currency and he wanted to know if Jack would part with some in the form of a deposit. They had \$268,515 gross receipts less their inventory plus most of the \$226,775 from the previous late season harvest. The banker said he could pay 6% on the money, deposited to checking. So, Jack deposited \$400,000 in the checking account at 6%. Normally, banks give a lower rate of interest on checking accounts, even high interest checking accounts.

You may have noticed that Jack hadn't divided up the money from the previous fall. But their shares on that money were \$75,592 apiece. The bank's computers still weren't up and they were doing everything with paper and pencil, so to speak. The month of August, through September 2 saw them harvest another 364 cords of wood and move it to Meeker, less an average of 20 cords per family (6 families, Ray is one family) for a net addition of 244 cords. That was when Don and Lane and the kids returned to Meeker, finally. School was to resume the day after Labor Day.

Now, with Don and Lane gone, they could only cut 10.5 cords per day. And, the snow came in the last week of September. They only added 205 cords that month when they had to knock off for the season. A quick recap showed that they had harvested 1,502 cords of wood. And by early October, the lot in town was empty. Dividing up the net \$235 per cord was a complicated task. Allen got 1 share, Ray and Lena 1 share each, Jack and Mary 1 share each, Rob and Sam 1 share each, Don and Lane 1 share each and Marge and Loretta $\frac{1}{2}$ share each plus $\frac{1}{6}$ th of the garden output to share with Ray and Lena. That was 10 shares of \$352,970 or 35,297 per share. And, by golly, they earned every penny. And, that didn't include the \$75,592 mentioned earlier. Jack and Mary ended up fattening their checking account by \$146,186 that year.

Ray wrote everyone except himself and Mary a check and they took them to Wells Fargo and deposited them. I'll bet you thought that the firewood business was a small time operation. Maybe it was until the day after Armageddon. But, there was a problem that would force a change the following year. They were going to have to move their operation to the southern section of the White River National Forest. Gee, is that all, I thought they had a problem? Well they did, the southern section was southeast of Glenwood Springs. But, they had a long winter to figure it out. They went hunting after the firewood operation shut down and each of the 6 families got a deer or an elk (or 2). Do you remember from one of my tales that a 40' semi-trailer holds 24 cords of wood?

"Allen, I don't quite know how we're going to handle the firewood operation this coming summer," Jack said. "With the fuel situation, we won't be able to get all of that wood up to Meeker."

"Jack, why not use a semi, they hold 24 cords of wood?" Allen asked. "And since June isn't working, you can open up a lot in Glenwood Springs. She can run that one and I'll cover the one in Meeker. You can just tack on the delivery charge split 24 ways onto the wood we sell here in town."

"Where would we stay?" Jack asked. "You're talking about 11 people, counting June."

"So buy a house down in Glenwood Springs," Allen suggested. "Or, look around for an abandoned one."

"That's still going to leave us one person short," Jack said, "We need someone to watch the grandchildren."

"Nancy isn't working," John added, "Maybe she could do that."

"I don't know about leaving Marge and Loretta unprotected minding the garden," Jack objected.

"So, give 'em each a Glock and teach them to shoot. You need to get Lena a Redhawk anyway," John said.

"I don't, Ray does or she can buy her own," Jack said.

"I suppose it's all the same difference," Allen said, "The word is that they're getting married."

"I've got a couple of cases of those Buffalo Bore +P+ .44 Magnum loads," John said.

"Not anymore, I'll take 'em," Jack smiled.

"Do you save your brass?" John asked.

"I must have several pails of the stuff, why?" Jack asked.

"Give them to me and I'll reload them," John replied. "Ammo is as good as gold."

"Ok, John, I'll do that," Jack replied. "Say you know, I would have thought that by now we would have had roving gangs of looters all over the country."

"They're out there, Jack," the Sheriff said. "They just haven't worked their way down to Meeker, yet. They'll be dang sorry if they do, too. The whole town is armed to the teeth and I've had Deputies doing some training. The Army gave me several cases of Armory reworked semi-auto only M16A2 rifles and plenty of ammo and magazines."

"Ok, John, you have a talk with Nancy and Allen you check with June," Jack said. "Mary and I will drive down to Glenwood Springs and look for a house."

"Do you have enough money for a house?" Allen asked.

"I'll just write them a check," Jack said. "It pays to be frugal."

They found an old '3-story' down in Glenwood Springs and just like Jack said, he paid cash for the house. A trip or two to Goodwill furnished it and they were set for the coming year. He didn't figure that there would be a WW IV so he didn't get too excited about equipping the house. They had their BOB's and could always make their way back to Meeker. Put one hell of a dent in that checking account, though. Not bad for a guy who had started with an old jeep and a stray dog.

Marge and Loretta spent some of their newly found capital on Glock 23C's and Ray bought Lena a Redhawk as one of her many wedding presents. June and Nancy said that they would run the Glenwood Springs lot and watch the kids. Jack found an out of work trucker who was more than willing to haul the wood. He suggested that they strap the wood on pallets. It would cut down on his load slightly, but it would make handling the firewood a lot easier and cut down ever so slightly on his fuel consumption. Of course, Jack didn't just fall off the turnip truck and he realized that it would also mean more loads for the trucker. Still it cut down on the handling so he bought 2 used forklifts, one for each lot.

The scheme of things was to haul the wood into the lot at Glenwood Springs and do the splitting there. About $\frac{1}{2}$ of the wood would be placed on a pallet, $\frac{1}{4}$ cord per and strapped in place. Those loads would be trucked to Meeker. Customers from Rifle and Glenwood Springs could just pick their wood up at the lot in Glenwood Springs. They also picked up a small travel trailer so the kids could stay at the lot during the day. There was safety in numbers, after all. Everyone with a Redhawk wore it and the others their Glock's.

The Loner – Chapter 36 – Expanded Operations

They also increased the number of speed loaders from 2 to 4 for each person with a Redhawk. Two of the Speed loaders were loaded with the Buffalo Bore +P+ ammo and 2 with the Remington JHP. Hell, the JHP were good enough for dirty Harry and they were good enough if they ran into any 2-legged bears. They drove to Glenwood Springs on the afternoon of Sunday, March 30, 2036 and started in the forest the next morning, Jack, Ray and Rob. Mary went looking and found a fenced lot and rented it. Then she hauled the trailer to the lot and dropped it. After, she made 2 more trips hauling the splitters to the lot.

Rob, Jack and Ray had driven down the Snow Cat with that dang sled strapped on the roof. At the house they had installed the treads and were ready to go the next morning. The sky was visibly lighter because of a second cold, hard winter with snow over the Indian's head. It was all Carl Sagan's fault. If he hadn't come up with the idea of a nuclear winter, they'd have never had one, right? Uh huh.

During the period of March 30 through June first, they were forced to use the Snow Cat. While they could cut 10.5 cords a day, on average, they could only haul 3. That was 9 solid weeks of working 7 days a week. They didn't take Sunday mornings off this season, not wanting to find a new church. $9 \times 7 \times 10.5 = 661.5$ cords, but it was really 662. $9 \times 7 \times 3 = 189$. Monday, June 2, 2036 through August 31, 2035 was 13 weeks. $13 \times 7 \times 14 = 1,274$ minus 14 because they took off Independence Day. $662 + 1,274 = 1,936$. The delivery charges for the wood to get it from Glenwood Springs to Meeker were just tacked on to the price. Jack computed all of his costs and figured that it still was only running them \$15 a cord because of the surcharges. They took 136 cords to spit among the 6 families, leaving 1,800 for sale. So, 1,800 times \$235 was \$423,000. But, there were more shares this year. June got a full share, as did Nancy (nothing was too good for the grandchildren). \$423,000 divided by 12 was \$35,250 each or \$70,500 a couple. Before it was all said and done, there was no firewood left.

"I don't know if I can do that another year," Jack said, "I'm not getting any younger."

"You might not have to," Mary laughed. "Lane and Sam and Lena are all pregnant."

"If you know that, they must be at least a month along," Jack said, "Let's see, that would make them all due in May or sooner. So, give 'em a month to get over it and we can have a full season next year."

"Jack, Lincoln freed the slaves," Mary said.

"Yeah right and FDR gave 'em welfare," Jack laughed. "So what, honey, we will be back up here next year and they can work $\frac{1}{2}$ time and trade off watching the babies. We won't need Nancy and that will cut us to 11 shares."

“Make it 10 shares, Jack,” Mary suggested, “I think we can handle the garden and let Marge and Loretta raise their own. Anyway, Ray and Lena live with them so it won’t be like they don’t have an income.”

Things don’t always work out quite the way you plan them, do they. This was Labor Day, Monday, September 1, 2036. Lena announced that she wouldn’t be working anymore because she was going to stay home and raise their baby. Loretta announced that she was more than willing to take Lena’s place because her mother and she needed some income. I wonder what they did for income before Jack came along. Oh, that’s right that was before WW III and the war had cost Marge her job. Nancy was relieved that she wouldn’t be babysitting anymore because it was just too much work taking care of 4 kids, let alone 6. Musical people, huh?

Ray took Jack aside and said that he didn’t quite agree with the accounting. There had been 7 out of the 20 weeks when Don and Lane hadn’t been working with them and yet they got a full share. Fortunately, Jack hadn’t written the checks yet, he’d just passed out his spreadsheet. He agreed with Ray to separately account for the two periods and told him he needed a day or two to correct his figures. $662 \times \$235 = \$155,750$ divided 10 ways = $\$15,575$ a share. $1,800 \times \$235 = \$423,000$ divided 12 ways is $\$35,250$. Ray and Lena got $\$101,614$, Rob and Sam got $\$101,614$, Loretta and Marge split $\$50,807$, Lane and Don got $\$70,500$ and Allen and June got $\$101,614$. Of course, Jack was depositing the receipts in his checking account daily and only paid at the end of the season. His gross deposits equaled $\$615,000$ for the 5-month period. And, he was earning 6% on the checking account, right? That’s approximately $\frac{5}{12} \times .06 \times \$307,500 = \$7,687.50$ or maybe a little less; Ray wasn’t quite as smart as he thought he was. Or, maybe a little more, interest compounded daily, thank God they got their computers up.

The bottom line, money wise was that Jack and Mary didn’t have to worry anymore. The full faith and a lot of credit were backing up the US dollar. Besides there wasn’t any world market in gold and silver; not since September 16, 2034 because you couldn’t eat metal. Made in the USA, boy, the Boss would be happy with that. No wait, that was ‘Born in the USA’, wasn’t it and he was a Democrat!

*Born down in a dead man's town
The first kick I took was when I hit the ground
You end up like a dog that's been beat too much
Till you spend half your life just covering up*

*Born in the USA.
I was born in the USA
I was born in the USA
Born in the USA*

*Got in a little hometown jam
So they put a rifle in my hand
Sent me off to a foreign land*

To go and kill the yellow man

*Born in the USA
I was born in the USA
I was born in the USA
I was born in the USA
Born in the USA*

*Come back home to the refinery
Hiring man says "Son if it was up to me"
Went down to see my V.A. man
He said "Son, don't you understand"*

*I had a brother at Khe Sahn fighting off the Viet Cong
They're still there, he's all gone*

*He had a woman he loved in Saigon
I got a picture of him in her arms now*

*Down in the shadow of the penitentiary
Out by the gas fires of the refinery
I'm ten years burning down the road
Nowhere to run ain't got nowhere to go*

*Born in the USA
I was born in the USA
Born in the USA
I'm a long gone Daddy in the USA
Born in the USA
Born in the USA
Born in the USA
I'm a cool rocking Daddy in the USA*

It's ok folks; they nuked the crap out of New Jersey. And, if you believed George W. Bush, God was a Republican. I guess that Ray must have been a fan of the Boss, 'No-where to run ain't got nowhere to go'...

The only real difference in their operation would be that they trucked the firewood to Glenwood Springs from Meeker. The tractor-trailer rig could come right out to the cabin and use the forklift to load up, just as soon as Jack built a ramp. There weren't any elections in 2034 or in 2036 because they still couldn't get the system up and running. Jack hadn't seen a disability check in 2 years either; it was good he didn't depend on them to live on. No, Jack and family depended upon blood, sweat, tears and a few blisters to get them through. Then, the hens got too old and quit laying eggs. Typically, as I understand it, a hen is a good layer for only about three years. After that, she is stew meat.

Remember when Sam Walton was alive and Wal-Mart bragged about all of their products being made in the USA? And, how the kids had changed all of that? And, how people used to joke about them and call them China-Mart? Well, what goes around comes around, doesn't it? The Wal-Mart stores that were still open after September 16, 2034 had a problem; nobody wanted anything made in China. And most of their American suppliers had either been wiped out or had major distribution problems. What do they call that? Oh, poetic justice, huh? It was a darn shame they didn't sell guns, they'd still be in business. They'd gone liberal and cut that out a long time ago.

"Clothing sewn in China is usually done by young women, 17 to 25 years old (at 25 they are fired as 'too old') forced to work seven days a week, often past midnight for 12 to 28 cents an hour, with no benefits. Or that the women are housed in crowded, dirty dormitories, 15 to a room, and fed a thin rice gruel. The workers are kept under 24-hour-a-day surveillance and can be fired for even discussing factory conditions. The factories in China operate under a veil of secrecy, behind locked metal gates, with no factory names posted and no visitors allowed. China's authorities do not allow independent human rights, religious or women's groups to exist, and all attempts to form independent unions have been crushed."

Explain something to me; I'm kind of dense. If it is so secret and the metal gates are locked, etc. how do they know all of these things? Just curious. Forgive me for getting a little political back there, but by now, you should know how I feel about things.

They still had Thanksgiving to get through and Christmas. There weren't any toys available for the kids. In fact, there was precious little anything, even clothing was hard to come by. There are 2 solutions to a problem like not enough clothing to go around. One is to trade your kids' outgrown clothing to someone who can still get some use out of it. Used beats the hell out of walking around naked in -30° weather. And, what about some of that elk skin clothing? Got some heavy blankets?

Christmas was awash with homemade clothing. But, it was hard to tell if Jack was the cowboy or the Indian. He had that hat and those boots and elk skin clothing. Read about the clothing and the leather. Mary was sure getting her money's worth out of that sewing machine. And then a realtor came out to the cabin one clear day after Christmas and wanted to know if Jack was interested in selling that house down in Glenwood Springs. He sort of let it slip that he had a customer that really wanted that particular house. Then, he tried to be coy and cover up his gaff.

"Well, gee, I don't know that I want to sell it," Jack said. "I have close to \$200,000 in the place (\$151,000) and I made a lot of improvements (Swept the floor plus 1 gallon of paint at 10.95 and tax) plus there are all of those fancy furnishings (Goodwill's best). And, I use the place in my business (used, not use)."

"Jack, I'm authorized to offer up to \$225,000 for the place," the realtor said.

"Mary what do you think?" Jack asked.

"I don't know Jack, I'd hate to see you lose money on the place," Mary said. (That was true, but she didn't say he was going to lose money, just that she hated to see him lose money.)

"\$230,000," the realtor said.

"Have you met my son Rob?" Jack asked. "Rob really thought that house was something else." (That's exactly what Rob had said, 'This place is something else.')

"\$235,000, but I can't go any higher," the realtor said.

"Man shouldn't have to take a beating," Jack said. (He didn't say who was taking a beating.)

"\$237,500 and that's as high as I can go," the realtor said.

"Mister, you've just bought yourself a house," Jack offered his hand.

They did all of the paperwork and Jack signed the offer as accepted at \$237,500. Not bad for an afternoon's work and he was afraid he was stuck with that house. So anyway, Jack and Mary certainly didn't have to work anymore, but this firewood business was doing pretty good by them and Jack didn't have a million dollars, yet. And, it didn't really matter if his money was in his high interest savings account or his high interest checking account or a CD; they were all paying the same 6%. The government had capped the interest rates.

I know, I know, but is it Jack's fault that that realtor was a faulty listener? Guy's in the real estate business can't afford to let things slip and they should really learn to listen closely to what people say. Jack and Mary had been married for a very long time and Rob never even opened his mouth, he was just standing there and Jack introduced him to that realtor. No, I don't like realtors, they're bloodsuckers charging 10% commissions, even if all they do is list the home and sell it to the first family that looks at it. I mean really, 10% of a quarter of a million dollars for 2 days work? And, the escrow company handles all of the paperwork once there is a signed offer and acceptance.

That was one hell of a nice birthday present that Jack got wasn't it? With the air beginning to clear, the temperatures warmed slightly and the snowfall lessened. There was something about all that particulate matter that contributed to the heavier than normal snowfalls, probably the water sticking... Jack suspected that he probably only had a couple more good years before it warmed up to the point that firewood sales would drop. The government was pulling out all stops trying to rebuild the infrastructure of the country. The first order of business had been to get fuel supplies restored and delivered. And, the second order of business was to rework the railroad system.

At the same time, other crews were trying to get electricity and natural gas service up and running. 2½ years after the 16th of September 2034 they were just finishing up clearing the demolished cities. Congress was being run out of an auditorium and the President remained at Mt. Weather. He was waiting for the White House to be rebuilt and as far as he was concerned, that wasn't the highest priority. The government was planning the first elections for the following year, November of 2038. It was an off year election, but nobody was concerned about any term limits. More than one law was being ignored as the country tried to rebuild itself.

It wasn't much different around the world. Continents that had been spared were growing all of the food possible to feed the remainder of the world. It took a lot less than one might imagine. Some countries were nearly devoid of humanity. If the bombs hadn't gotten them and the radiation missed them many starved to death in the first year and a half after Armageddon. That's what they called it, Armageddon. Somehow it seemed appropriate. The world had ended up losing about ½ of its population on that day and in its aftermath. How many more people would die from cancer and other illness remained to be seen. In the US, the death toll was extreme on the coasts and in the big cities but rural areas had been spared. Given some warning, most people had somehow managed to find shelter and ride out the radioactive storm.

And then, in the two years of twilight that followed, many rural communities came together and did what they must to survive. Greenhouses were converted to growing houses and artificial light supplied to replace the missing sunlight. Generators for those greenhouses had the highest priority and a lot of people learned to live with kerosene lamps again. The Army and other branches of the military had worked very, very hard distributing supplies and maintaining order. Few people objected to the role the military played and those ingrates who did found themselves working at hard labor. FEMA had tried to take over the cleanup efforts, pushing the military aside. But, after a few incidents like the one I mentioned in Meeker, they had trouble getting people to work for them. FEMA was better suited to the smaller natural disasters where money was a solution. And, it wasn't a police state, because local rule was in vogue.

The Loner – Chapter 37 – A New Found Freedom

Some folks call it Home Rule. Home rule, municipal, system adopted in many states of the United States by which a city is given the right to draft and amend its own charter and to regulate purely local matters without interference from the state legislature. The rapid growth of urban centers in the latter part of the 19th century brought new and complex problems; the state legislatures, which had controlled most city government, found themselves incapable of handling the fast-growing cities. In 1875, Missouri adopted the first municipal home rule clause in its constitution; other states have followed its lead. The form of the rule varies greatly from state to state. There are two principal types of municipal home rule: constitutional home rule, by which cities are given the right by the state constitution to form their own charters; and legislative home rule, by which local autonomy is granted through an act of the state legislature. Local and general concerns cannot, of course, be strictly delimited, and there are frequent legal and political contests concerning jurisdiction. The growing importance of the suburbs and the relative decline of cities have led to the concept of metropolitan government as an intermediary between city and state government.

The founding Fathers' called the country the United States of America. That meant that the state was the principal political body, not the federal government. Somewhere along the line in the 261 years of the country's existence the federal government had become very powerful. Armageddon changed all of that. Washington, DC was just a smoldering pile of ash and although the representatives of the various state's populations had mostly survived; the states took the opportunity to reclaim their rightful role. Well, it sounds good on paper, but how did it really work? Pretty well actually, the very liberal states that considered the country a Democracy and overlooked that it was a Republic that had been decimated. And, I doubt that you could find many living souls that wanted a strong central government with the ability to wage war.

That might change in time, but at the moment, each state had to take care of its surviving population. There were survival minded people in both political parties but they seemed to favor the Republicans. The majority of the country that had survived was red on the political map anyway. There were still enclaves of Democrats, but people began to think of themselves as Minnesotans or Alabamans first and Americans second. So, how many people in the United States had survived? They wouldn't really know until 2040 when the next census was due, but the best estimates put the population at somewhere between 100 and 150 million. Regrettably, some of those folks were suffering the long-term effects of radiation or some other disease. I didn't say that there wasn't any disease, just that the colder climates, like Colorado, had been spared, especially remote communities like Meeker.

And, Jack Summers had a large supply of N-95 masks that were employed when making contact with outsiders like at the firewood lots. And if he didn't have enough, that first shipment of paper products included dozens of cases of the 3M N-95 masks because the Army wasn't sure about disease early on. Allen and June even went to the extreme of wearing those latex gloves and they disinfected the currency before they

passed it on. I believe that the flash point of ordinary paper is Fahrenheit 451, is it not? Talk about hot cash, but baking it at 250° for a while and then freezing it seemed to eliminate any disease. Wait a minute does that make it hot cash or cold cash?

Jack, Rob and Ray hit the woods on Monday, March 30, 2037. They now had the benefit of a Park Service Survey of downed timber and were able to forge right ahead. It was the usual scene with them taking the Snow Cat and sled and harvesting 10½ cords per day or about 68 cords a week for a full 6½-day week. They had 9 weeks of that before Don could join them. Jack made certain that he noted that the 614 cords of wood harvested during that period was separately accounted for. During late April and early May, 3 babies were born. Ray got a son, Raymond, Jr., Lane had a girl, Janice June (JJ) and Sam had a boy, John Allen. With only Mary to tend to things, she hauled and split firewood and stacked it into cords until she could get into the garden. Then, she tilled what amounted to a garden and one-half and took the rototiller to Meeker and tilled Marge's garden. Loretta graduated from high school in the spring of 2037, having been delayed by one year because the school system had been shut down.

On June 1, 2037, Don and Sam, Lane and Loretta showed up and production immediately jumped to 14 cords a day harvested. Sam and Lane worked their butts off, literally, and soon had all of the previously cut firewood hauled in and split. Sometime in early May the ground had permitted the men to start using the pickups and trailers and they sort of over loaded them at the 3½ cords each they were currently cutting. The ladies found it easier to just palletize all of the wood, piling up ¼ cord and strapping it. Before they had gone to the woods in March, Rob, Ray and Jack had fought that frozen ground and managed to build a long ramp and a loading dock. Nothing fancy, but it worked. Then, in the evenings, they set up floodlights and formed and poured concrete.

With this new equipment it wasn't difficult for the ladies to catch up to the men and by the time Mary was occupied with the garden Lane and Sam were able to watch the kids ½ days. That Loretta was a pretty good worker too. They worked a full crew for 13 weeks, knocking off finally on the 30th of August. 13 weeks of 14 cords per day (the rate, the actual output was 13 cords per week) at 6½ days per week amounted to 1,183-14 cords of wood because they always took off Independence Day. The needs of the families were met from the second season harvest but they only needed 90 cords among them. $1,183 - 14 \cdot 90 = 1,079$. The first season split was $614 \times \$235 = \$144,290$ divided by 6 = \$24,048.00 per share. The second season split was $1,079 \times \$235$ divided by 10 = \$25,356.50 per share. Ray got \$49,404.50, Rob and Sam \$74,761, Loretta 25,356.50, Allen and June \$98,809 and Jack and Mary \$98,811 which included the \$2 rounding error. Jack had the foresight to keep his spreadsheet up to date and he handled out the checks at the Labor Day picnic. There weren't any complaints this year but perhaps a couple of people thought that Allen and June were overpaid because they hadn't done much, if any manual labor. Total retail production was 1,693 cords for a gross of \$423,250 before expenses. And all of the wood sold.

The morning before the picnic, Jack and Mary had a conversation. At the picnic, Jack announced the results of that conversation. Next year, 2038, would be his last year in

the business. The business would be for sale at \$281,000 to anyone within the extended family that now included Ray and Lena and Loretta. Jack said that he would finance the business over a reasonable period at 6% interest. One condition of the sale was that whoever bought it had to keep it a family business employing all of the current employees and a second condition was that the extended family would get free firewood for as long as they lived. The total equipment investment wasn't that much and he was willing to settle for goodwill equal to 2 full profit shares based on the 2036 business the sum of \$203,228. He valued the equipment at \$77,772, making the value of the business \$281,000. The equipment consisted of 4 used pickups, 8 trailers, 4 wood splitters, 2 forklifts and miscellaneous material handling equipment like strappers and miscellaneous supplies. Personally, Jack hoped that Rob would take over the business.

They pulled the little trailer back and forth between the cabin and Glenwood Springs because during the late fall and early winter that lot was a Christmas tree lot. Jack intended to keep the trailer and didn't include it in his equipment list. Maybe with the country starting to get back together, Mary and he could travel in another year or so. So, he spent the fall making some minor modifications to the trailer. The sofa became a gun safe, etc. Just your typical modifications for a survival minded individual who didn't know what he might run up against. They were getting their share of the food the government was able to supply, mostly staples and paper products. And, to think that at one time he'd wondered if the preparations were all worth the cost and effort. It had been a long time from one event to the next but when the big one came all of those years of patience and preps had paid off.

It was around Thanksgiving when Rob showed up to talk to him.

"Dad, I'm going to pass on buying the business," Rob said. "I've been turning down work to cut firewood and with everyone trying to rebuild their system I can make 5 times as much money sitting at my computer."

"I'd hoped that you take it over, Rob," Jack admitted, "but I sure can understand. Ok, I'll scratch you off the list."

At Thanksgiving dinner, Don and Lane essentially told him the same thing, but suggested that he might want to hold onto the old splitters, just in case, and maybe the old chainsaws. Christmas came and went; it was another of those homemade deals. In January Ray, Lena and Loretta drove out to talk to Jack about the business.

"Jack, I'd like to take a shot at the business," Ray said. "We'll have to work something out, though. I can't supply free firewood, but I can sell it at cost."

"I can live with that Ray, but how do you figure to pay for the business?" Jack asked.

"I thought maybe we'd close that lot in Glenwood Springs and just run the lot in Meeker," Ray replied. "Marge can do that."

“What about Allen and June?” Jack asked.

“Running a sales lot isn’t worth more than a ½ share,” Ray replied sharply. “It wasn’t my business so I kept my mouth shut. If they want to work for a ½ share and free firewood, they can stay on. That will be up to them. But it will be a ½ share whether one or both of them work.”

“I see,” Jack said, “Any other changes?”

“Well, those old chainsaws and splitters have seen better days, so you keep them and I’ll go \$280,000 for the business,” Ray said pleasantly.

“I was thinking about taking them out of the package anyway,” Jack responded, “I can live with that. How about those old trailers?”

“If you can live with \$275,000,” Ray said, “You can keep a couple of those.”

“Well, those 4 old ones won’t do you much good, Ray,” Jack said. “Tell you what I’ll keep 3 of them at \$275,000.”

“That would still leave me 5, so it will work,” Ray said. “I’d need a Covenant Not To Compete for 5 years.”

“Which of course wouldn’t prevent us from harvesting fire wood for our own use, right?” Jack asked.

“Naturally, Jack,” Ray said.

“How are you going to pay me \$275,000?” Jack asked. “I’d better warn you that the firewood business wouldn’t be as good in coming years as it has been.”

“Loretta, Lena, Marge and I are going to be partners,” Ray explained. “We saved back about ½ of the money from this last year and ¾ of the money from 2036. I have \$100,000 I can put down plus ½ of whatever we earn this coming summer.”

“I expect that would about ½ pay for the business, Ray,” Jack agreed. “You shouldn’t be counting on Rob or Lane; they both want to get out of the firewood business.”

“Yes, I know Jack, I talked to each of them separately and gave them first right of refusal,” Ray said, “Just in case they wanted to keep the business in the immediate family.”

“I appreciate that Ray,” Jack replied, “I’ll finance the other half at 6% for up to 5 years.”

“Do we have a deal then?” Ray asked.

“Yep. But I sure hope you know what you’re getting into,” Jack said.

“We’ll be okay Mr. Summers,” Lena said. “Marge will watch Ray, Jr. and Loretta and I will work in the business full time.”

“I’d get me a dog if I were you,” Jack said.

“There’s some folks in Meeker that raise German Shepherd’s,” Ray said, “I’m getting a pup from them”

“I might know the family,” Jack chuckled.

Monday, March 29, 2038, they hit the woods for one last time. Jack, Ray and Rob went out to cut deadfalls and Sam hauled in from the woods. Loretta did the splitting and Mary watched the kids. They were cutting 3½ cords apiece from the very first day and Loretta didn’t have any problem keeping up with them. Sam alternated between hauling logs in from the woods and delivering palletized firewood to the lot in Meeker. They sat the trailer on the lot so Allen and June could keep warm. In the period of March 29 through June 6, 10 weeks, they harvested 10½ cords a day, 6½ days a week, or 683 cords.

Then, Don and Lane showed up and Mary was busier than a one-armed paperhanger between the garden and the kids. The period from June 7 through September 5 was 13 weeks and they worked at full capacity producing 14 cords a day. Independence Day 2038 was on a Sunday. $14 \times 6\frac{1}{2} \times 13 = 1,183.5$ for Independence Day and -72 for their personal needs leaving 1,104 retail cords for the second season.

The first season was divided 8 ways and included Jack, Mary, Rob, Sam, Ray, Loretta, Allen and June. Each share was \$20,063. The second season was divided 10 ways because it included Lane and Don. Each share for the second season was \$25,944. All of the firewood was gone as fast as they could get it to Meeker. Net sales had been \$419,944 and on Labor Day, Jack handed out the checks. Ray and Loretta each got \$46,007; Lane and Don got \$51,888, and Sam and Rob, June and Allen each got checks for \$92,014, the same amount that Jack and Mary earned. And thus ended the saga of the Summers family and the firewood business. Ray and Loretta didn’t have any problem coming up with the ½ down for the business and they moved all of the equipment to Meeker before the snow came. Ray had enough left over to put a down payment on that lot and he had a permanent place of business.

Jack had time on his hands during September and he took the 4 old chainsaws and the 2 old splitters into Meeker to get them serviced. Then, when he got everything back, he slapped a coat of fresh paint on the splitters. He’d worked over the trailers while the other things were in the shop and the wheel bearings were freshly repacked and they sported a new coat of paint, Rust-Oleum. They also got to town and restocked all of their food supplies. They couldn’t get stuff from Walton Feeds yet, but the stores had meat and staples, albeit at an elevated price.

Jack bought sub-primal cuts for the first time in 4 years and restocked the freezers with everything in vacuum packs. He had a supply of the oxygen absorbers and they were also able to refill the 6-gallon pails. He even got wheat from a granary and refilled those pails. They had to make substitutions for the things in the #10 cans, but it wasn't that hard to do, one just had to be resourceful. Did I mention that John had reloaded all of his ammo at a dirt-cheap price? These people were set for WW IV. Some of the money went to rebuild the wind turbine, again, and replace outdated medical supplies. Jack had done what he could back at Armageddon and shared what he could spare when Meeker ran low.

The dogs had all been about 2 years old when they'd gotten them late in '31 or early in '32. They had plenty of companionship mileage left in them. I expect that they were all about 8 years old, give or take. There was enough room in the freezers for some game and John, Allen, Don, Rob and Jack went hunting that fall. They each got one elk and one deer. Those suppressors had their place after all. Everyone had a M1A Super Match rifle with the fancy scope and Harris bipod and Surefire Suppressor. And there was plenty of that Black Hills ammo to go around. If there hadn't been, John had reloaded the hulls to the same specs that Black Hills had used so his ammo was plenty good.

Robbie was the oldest grandchild; he'd turned 10 in July. Allen and John donated their elk skins and deerskins and Mary and the girls were sewing up a storm. Jack had run out of things to do, and his knee was bothering him a little. Must have worn out that artificial joint. Jack was 60 years old and he didn't know if he wanted to go through another surgery or even if they had artificial joints available so he kept his mouth shut about the knee.

"Are you limping again, Dad?" Rob asked.

"Maybe a little, Rob, I suppose I wore out the knee," Jack admitted.

"You need to have that replaced, Dad, or it will screw up your hip," Rob suggested.

"I hadn't thought about that Rob, are they still doing knee replacements?" Jack asked.

"I'm not sure, but I think so," Rob said, "Why don't you take your own advice and go see Doc?"

After the first of the year, Jack did and the doctor could and the next thing you knew, he was back in physical therapy. He sure hoped that this new model lasted longer. They told him that advances before the big war had extended the life of the artificial knees to 20 years or more. Yeah right, were these the same people who said silicone breast implants didn't leak? All things considered, he'd done pretty good with that first knee and he abused it a lot over the 10 or so years he'd had it. They told him that his hip was just fine.

The Loner – Chapter 38 – Growing Old Gracefully

“We’ve had quite a run, Mary,” Jack said on his 61st birthday in 2039.

“Two wonderful kids and 6 great grandchildren, Jack,” she mused. “I don’t know what could be better than that.”

“I can tell you what’s second best,” Jack chuckled. “I got the bank statement. We’re just shy of that million dollars I wanted and between the interest we earn and don’t spend and the money from Ray, we’ll go over.”

“At least you got that knee replaced so we can get out,” Mary said. “I think that I’m just going to sit down and get fat. I’m glad that you decided to call an end to the firewood operations. I’m not sure if I could have done it another year.”

“I’m sure that Sam will tend the garden, so maybe we can take it easy and travel,” Jack suggested, “That’s why I fixed up that trailer.”

“Maybe next year, Jack,” she suggested, “You don’t want to be abusing that knee just yet and I could use a year of rest.”

People who do hard manual labor for a living and sudden stop are sometimes beset with health problems. At least that’s what it said on the recently restored Internet. It was a National system only with no links to foreign countries. Congress had gotten its act together and had created legislation that put the total burden for those more questionable websites right where it belonged, on the companies that issued the Domain Names. Let me tell you, those companies did a lot of checking and at the first sign of trouble, revoked the Internet address. The same legislation made SPAM a felony. Of course, the lawyers sued, but that could take forever.

Things were a whole lot different in the post Apocalypse. Some countries still had nuclear weapons, but having seen what a nuclear holocaust was like weren’t in any hurry to dig them out of storage. The world had taken a step back in time maybe 80-90 years before missiles became the delivery systems. The problem with a missile was that it was so impersonal. Things had been different, perhaps only a little, when they had to rely on bombers to deliver their death and destruction. Things have a way of going full circle and what had begun on the morning of August 6, 1945 had ended on September 16, 2034.

In both Hiroshima (6Aug45) and Nagasaki (9Aug45) the tremendous scale of the disaster largely destroyed the cities as entities. Even the worst of all other previous bombing attacks on Germany and Japan, such as the incendiary raids on Hamburg in 1943 and on Tokyo in 1945, were not comparable to the paralyzing effect of the atomic bombs. In addition to the huge number of persons who were killed or injured so that their services in rehabilitation were not available, a panic flight of the population took place from both cities immediately following the atomic explosions. No significant reconstruction or re-

pair work was accomplished because of the slow return of the population; at the end of November 1945 each of the cities had only about 140,000 people. Although the ending of the war almost immediately after the atomic bombings removed much of the incentive of the Japanese people toward immediate reconstruction of their losses, their paralysis was still remarkable. Even the clearance of wreckage and the burning of the many bodies trapped in it were not well organized some weeks after the bombings. As the British Mission has stated, 'the impression which both cities make is of having sunk, in an instant and without a struggle, to the most primitive level.'

Aside from physical injury and damage, the most significant effect of the atomic bombs was the sheer terror, which it struck into the peoples of the bombed cities. This terror, resulting in immediate hysterical activity and flight from the cities, had one especially pronounced effect: persons who had become accustomed to mass air raids had grown to pay little heed to single planes or small groups of planes, but after the atomic bombings the appearance of a single plane caused more terror and disruption of normal life than the appearance of many hundreds of planes had ever been able to cause before. The effect of this terrible fear of the potential danger from even a single enemy plane on the lives of the peoples of the world in the event of any future war can easily be conjectured.

The atomic bomb did not alone win the war against Japan, but it most certainly ended it, saving the thousands of Allied lives that would have been lost in any combat invasion of Japan. (Same source.)

The more that Jack thought about touring the country the less he liked the idea. It just wouldn't be the same because almost every famous building had been destroyed. The attacks on September 11, 2001 had forever altered the skyline of New York City and the attacks on September 16, 2034 had forever altered the skyline of the country. Maybe they'd just confine their visits to National Parks and such; he'd always wanted to see Yellowstone. But even that was a calculated risk because since 2034, those calderas were a tiny bit more active.

Today's Yellowstone landscape represents the last in a sequence of calderas - the broad crater-like basins created when volcanoes explode and their characteristic cones collapse - that formed in regular progression over the past 2 million years. The near-clockwork timing of eruptions there - 2 million years ago, 1.3 million years ago and 600,000 years ago - suggests a pattern that may foreshadow an eruption of catastrophic proportions, said Bindeman and Valley. (UW-Madison geologists Ilya N. Bindeman and John W. Valley) Those super volcano eruptions seemed to come in 700,000-year cycles and they said it would be 100,000 years before Yellowstone blew up so maybe Mary and he could go there the following summer. There really wasn't anything in California or on the east coast that he wanted to see anyway. As far as going to any of the other National Forests, Jack figured he'd seen enough trees to last him the rest of his life.

All of the bombs hitting California had triggered a series of medium earthquakes along the San Andreas Fault so California was probably safe from earthquakes for a few years. They weren't any big deal, measuring below 7 on the Richter scale but who could know because those earthquake centers in California and Colorado had disappeared during Armageddon. Jack was a man without purpose, not uncommon for men who just retired. He didn't fish and only went hunting once a year; what he needed was a hobby. Hey Jack, did you ever think about writing? With your background and experiences, you could write Patriot Fiction.

Jack always thought best when he had a chainsaw in his hand. So, he got his favorite chainsaw, loaded it and a can of gas in his shiny new pickup and headed for the woods. He could do anything he wanted, now that he was retired. "A holiday spent in following or observing one's usual occupation." You know what a busman's holiday is right? It felt good having that chainsaw vibrating in his hands. Brutus sure seemed to be home in the woods. Before he knew it, Jack had cut up about 2 cords of logs, more than he could get in his pickup. So, he loaded the bed and hauled them back to the cabin and dumped them. He wasn't sure if the rest of the wood would fit in his truck so he hitched up a trailer and went back for the rest. After he'd loaded the wood on the pickup and a little on the trailer, he decided that he'd better cut a little more to keep the logs from bouncing around and scratching up that new paint job. Anyway, he fired up the chainsaw just to cut a few more logs and the next thing he knew it was starting to get dark. He fired up the pickup and turned on the lights and loaded the wood before he went home.

"Your supper is on the table," Mary said. "Didn't you hear my radio calls?"

"Sorry, it must have been the chainsaw, Mary," he apologized.

"What did you think you were doing?" she asked, "You didn't even take a gun."

"It's too early in the season for bears and I just went out to cut a little wood," he explained.

"Jack, you left at sunup and didn't get home until after dark," Mary exclaimed. "Just how much wood did you cut?"

"Uh, I think 4 cords," he replied sheepishly, "I cut a couple and loaded one up and brought it back to the house. I wasn't sure if the truck would hold what was left so I hooked on a trailer. Then the trailer wasn't full and I didn't want the wood rolling around and well, you know."

"You only used to cut 3½ cords in a day," she said.

"Yeah, but we always stopped before dark, honey," Jack said.

"You're going to end up damaging your knee again," she said.

“Naw, this one’s guaranteed for 20 years,” Jack replied. “I’ll never live to 80.”

“You’re not going to make it to 62 if you keep scaring me like that,” she snapped.

“I’ve decided to take up a hobby,” Jack said.

“Oh good, what doing?” Mary asked.

“Cutting firewood,” he replied straight faced. “It will give me something to do. I won’t do like I did today, but there’s no reason that I can’t cut a little wood for the kids and us and our friends. Besides, you have your gardening and sewing to keep you busy.”

“Well, I suppose you could cut a little firewood, but remember that you have a Covenant Not to Compete with Ray,” Mary said.

“I wasn’t going to cut that much wood, honey, just a little,” he replied and sat down to eat his cold supper.

Jack did just that, he cut a little, 3 cords a day, every other day, 6 days a week. He cut on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays and split and stacked on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays. He took all day Sunday off for church and to visit with family. He mentioned that he had a little extra firewood and that they should come by and pick theirs up. And, that went on and on and on. He did stop and rototill the garden for Mary and help her plant. And, he did butcher and pluck the hens, all by himself. Those 2 weeks he only did 6 cords. And, of course, he took off 2 days around Monday July 4th.

From April 4, 2039 until he stopped on September 3rd, Jack had worked 21 weeks, but call it 20 because he lost the 3 pairs of days. Let’s see, 20 weeks at 9 cords a week is 180 cords. And Allen and June had told Ray that they couldn’t, or wouldn’t, work for ½ share; so they needed firewood, as did John and Nancy and Don and Lane and Rob and Sam. So, Jack only had 120 cords of extra wood stacked up when Ray came to bring him his check in September.

“Have a good summer, Ray?” Jack asked.

“Not too bad, Jack, we started April 6th and worked through to September 3rd,” Ray replied. “We worked 6½ days a week and harvested 7 cords a day. Didn’t take any time off either. We did 956 cords and grossed \$235,000 after we took out what we needed. Allen and June decided not to work for me.”

“Really?” Jack said.

“Yeah, I thought that they would buy some wood from me, but they must have gotten it someplace else,” Ray said.

“Oh probably,” Jack replied.

“Say, I noticed that you have a lot of wood stacked up, you didn’t sell them any did you?” Ray asked.

“Sell them firewood?” Jack asked. “Well no Ray, I didn’t sell any firewood this year, we have a Covenant, remember?”

“Be ok if I paid you off this year?” Ray asked.

“If you’d prefer, Ray,” Jack said, “Let’s see, that’s \$137,500 plus 6% interest for 6 months, \$141,625.”

“Didn’t sell any firewood, huh,” Ray said handing him the check. “I wonder where they got it?”

“Hard to say, Ray, maybe from someone else or maybe someone gave it to them,” Jack said folding the check and putting it in his pocket. “My family got wood from me, but that was part of the agreement, remember?”

“Yeah, right, I remember,” Ray said. “Thanks for everything, Jack, I’ve got to be going.”

“No, thank you Ray,” Jack said.

“Mary, get your coat, we’re going to town to deposit this check,” Jack said. “This will put us over the million dollars.”

“Ray want to know if you sold any firewood?” she asked.

“He asked, and I told him the truth, Mary” Jack smiled. “That I didn’t sell any firewood and only gave it to my family.”

“He must have forgotten how big our family is, Jack,” Mary laughed.

“Do you suppose?” Jack chuckled.

When they got to the bank, the banker took them aside and said that they had a problem. The FDIC limits were \$100,000 apiece or only \$200,000 in their case. He suggested that they convert to Payable-on-death (POD) accounts – also known as testamentary or Totten Trust accounts – the most common form of revocable trust deposits. These informal revocable trusts were created when the account owner signs an agreement – usually part of the bank’s signature card – stating that the funds will be payable to a beneficiary upon the owner’s death. They had \$500,000 apiece essentially and if they divided their money in half and Mary held half in a POD account with Jack and the kids and the grandchildren as beneficiaries and Jack did the same with Mary and the kids and the grandchildren as beneficiaries, they would be fully insured by FDIC. The signed

some paperwork resolving the problem. They could each accumulate 1+4+6 or \$1,100,000 in their names. Did you know that? Of course, if you don't get along with the wife, or husband, that might not be a good idea.

Yes sir, Jack had a hobby and it felt good, just like the 'good old days'. He was going to take a few days off the next year for sure and visit Yellowstone. Went hunting that fall with his 'family' and they each got a deer and an elk, all 5 of them. The county continued to rebuild and that's how they spent the next 4 years. By the fall of 2043, Jack had a pile of firewood that amounted to about 900 cords. Then, Mary made a suggestion. Why not, she said, get one of those packaging machines and wrap the firewood up in plastic sleeves like we see in the grocery store? Jack checked into it and found what he wanted and bought a machine. The ad said, "Packages @ \$2.50 ea. equals \$425.00 per cord or \$212,500 for every 500 cords."

The next summer, Jack started bundling the firewood 170 packages per cord. That agreement was up with Ray and he could sell firewood again. Paid for the machine in no time flat. The packages were each $\frac{3}{4}$ of a cubic foot, in case you're wondering. Not bad for a 65-year-old man, now was it? As it happened, by this time the weather was totally back to normal and the demand for bulk firewood was in the toilet. Ray wasn't doing too well in business anymore. Jack called him up and asked him if he would be interested in a five-year contract to supply him with firewood.

"Five-year contract?" Ray asked. "How much wood do you want to buy?"

"All you can produce, Ray," Jack said, "What kind of a price could you give me per cord if I bought all you could produce for 5-years?"

"What's the deal, Jack?" Ray asked, "What are you going to do with that much firewood?"

"I think maybe I'll sell it, Ray," Jack answered. "So, what kind of a price can you give me?"

The price of bulk firewood had fallen to \$165 a cord. Ray thought it over and said, "\$175 a cord, just in case the price goes up."

"I can live with that, Ray," Jack replied, "But I'd have to have some sort of guaranteed quantity."

"I can guarantee 1,000 cords a year, Jack," Ray said, "Is that enough?"

"Just right, have your attorney draw up the papers," Jack replied.

"Gee, thanks for the business, Jack," Ray said, "I was about to go belly up."

Let's see, $\$425 - \$175 = \$250 \times 1,000 = \$250,000 \times 5 = \$1,250,000$ plus interest. Hey, nobody said Jack was stupid. But, he never got to Yellowstone.

Good Night, Gracie!

Postnote: We often hear about the firebombing of Dresden and Tokyo. My question is this: Who started the fire bombing? Adolph Hitler.

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